The New Criterion

May 1993

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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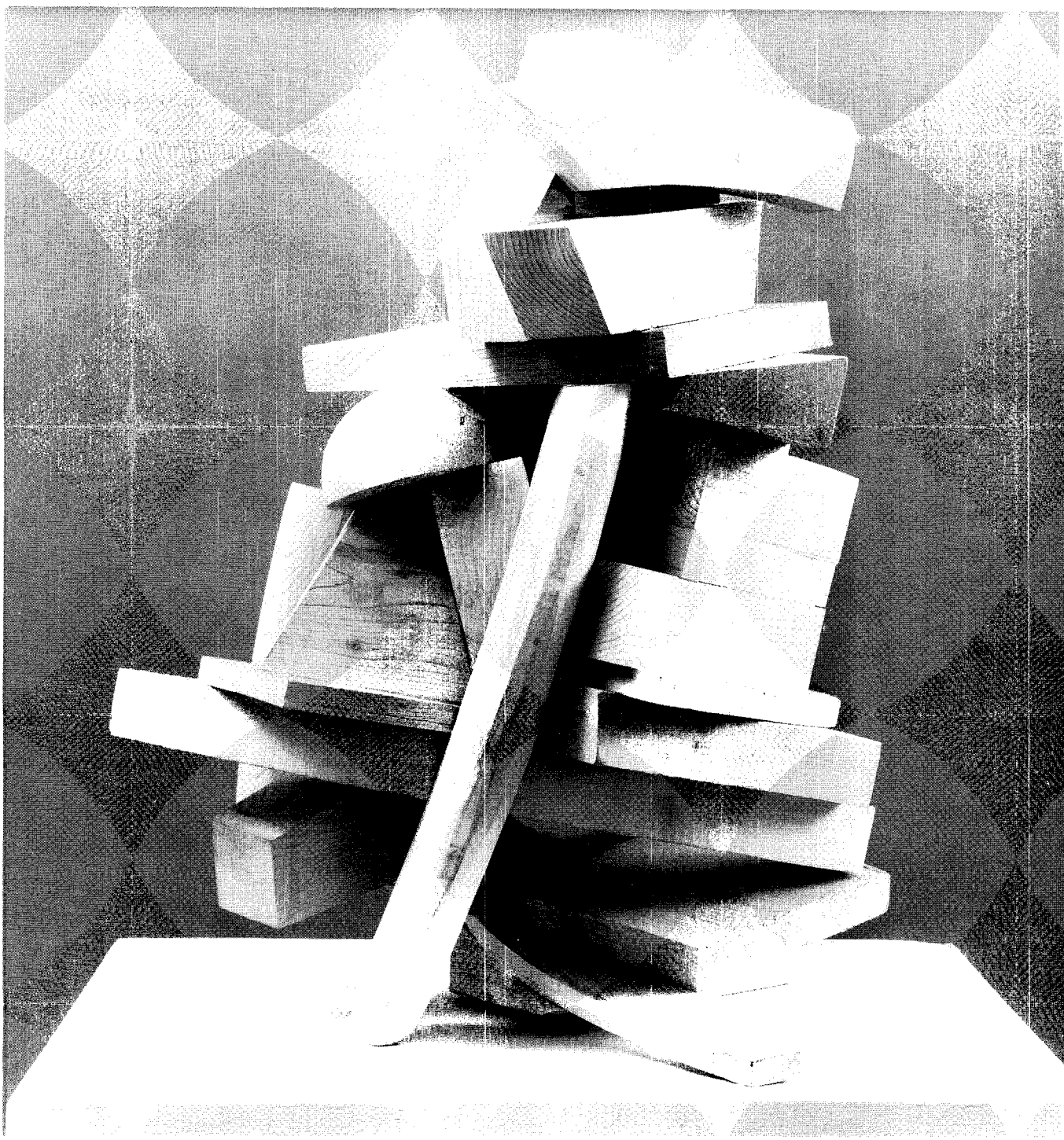

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Notes & Comments: May 1993

L'Affaire Derrida

Yet another display of academic fatuity and bad faith has been playing itself out recently, this time in the letters column of *The New York Review of Books*. The occasion was Thomas Sheehan's review last January of *The Heidegger Controversy*, a collection of essays edited by the historian Richard Wolin about Martin Heidegger's now infamous connection with Nazism in the 1930s. (For details of that connection, see Roger Kimball's article "Heidegger at Freiburg, 1933" in our June 1985 issue.) The protagonist is none other than Jacques Derrida, the second most overrated French intellectual in history.

A little background. The name of Derrida has been an unfortunate enchantment to hapless professors of literature and their graduate students since the mid-Sixties. As the chief architect of "deconstruction," the grim academic parlor game that did so much to destroy literary studies over the last three decades, Derrida has been the darling of irresponsible professors the world over. He has also been a darling of academic publishers. Derrida spawned an entire industry. Not only have his own books sold in the tens of thousands, but also an army of Lilliputian deconstructors—epigones brimming with Derridean slogans and hauteur—have tirelessly offered up their scribblings, interpretations, and hermeneutical hobbyhorses to the god of tenure and parochial notoriety.

Two things above all have endeared Derrida to his acolytes. First, there is his manner of writing. Impenetrable and exquisitely condescending, bloated by an anemic obsession with violence and outré sexuality, it has denatured a generation of literary scholarship, doing to academic prose what methanol does to whiskey. Second, there is Derrida's corrosive cynicism, the generalized intellectual destructiveness of deconstruction. This finds expression (to take a few examples from his invitingly titled book *Of Grammatology*) in Derrida's attempt to "decompose" "the signification of truth," in his insistence that one "cannot hold on to the difference between signifier and signified," in his suggestion that "the names of authors" "have no substantial value" and "indicate neither identities nor causes." In short, as Gertrude Stein said of Oakland, Derrida holds that there is no there there.

Susceptible academics have found all this —the poisonous prose, the make-believe kinkiness, the infatuation with nihilism—irresistible: one draught and they are hooked. In the present context, what is most risibly ironic is Derrida's deconstruction of authorship. It turns out that Wolin, who teaches at Rice University, had translated and included in *The Heidegger Controversy* an interview that Derrida gave to *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1987. Having discovered that the French publication, not Derrida, held the reprint rights to the interview, Wolin applied to the journal and paid for permission to translate

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and reprint the interview. That permission was granted, and the volume was duly published by Columbia University Press, also one of Derrida's American publishers.

Alas, Wolin did not ask Derrida himself for permission to reprint the interview. This would not have mattered—in fact, Wolin had been advised *not* to bother the busy philosopher with such a mundane request—if Wolin had not also had the temerity to *criticize* Derrida for his pompous evasions about Heidegger's political activities in the 1930s. No one who has followed Derrida's career will find it surprising that, as Wolin put it elsewhere, he "deconstructs into nonexistence the gravity of Heidegger's Nazism." Derrida did the same thing when the literary critic Paul de Man was discovered to have written scores of articles for pro-Nazi newspapers in the late Thirties and early Forties. But Derrida does not take kindly to criticism. When he discovered Wolin's book in a New York bookshop, he immediately had his lawyer write Columbia University Press threatening legal action. Never mind that Derrida had no case: the intimidation worked. Columbia let the book (which was selling briskly) go out of print and bullied Wolin into withdrawing a planned paperback edition even without the Derrida interview.

What, has Derrida decided that "the names of authors" have some "substantial value" after all? Does he now believe that a byline "indicates" an identity, maybe even a cause? Perhaps so. In his review of the paperback edition of *The Heidegger Controversy*—which MIT has just published sans the Derrida interview—Thomas Sheehan meticulously recounted the grisly tale and Derrida's shameful part in it. Derrida shot back an angry letter to the editor: "Do I not have the right to protest when a text of mine is published without my authorization, in a bad translation, and in what I think is a bad book?" He accused Sheehan of "falsification" and Wolin of "unbelievable, shocking and inadmissible behavior." Derrida also declared flatly that "no one ever threatened the existence of Mr. Wolin's book."

There has followed a flurry of letters—a baroque filigree of charges, counter-charges, counter-counter-charges—from the pusillanimous director of the Columbia University Press, Derrida, Wolin, and a long roster of academic groupies pathetically eager to stand up for their idol. Hélène Cixous, doyenne of dour French feminism, has even contributed a sub-literate letter complaining about the "hatred Mr. Sheehan spreads across the pages of his letter [answering Derrida]" and his mistranslation of a French dative. Sheehan himself, although he feels called upon repeatedly to assure readers that he "is no enemy of deconstruction," has patiently exposed every lie, evasion, and misrepresentation in the whole sordid case.

"No one ever threatened the existence of Mr. Wolin's book," Derrida sniffed. Yet on November 22, 1991, Derrida's lawyer wrote to Columbia University Press to assert Derrida's right "to procure the seizure of the book that you published without his agreement," and requiring as a condition for not suing that "all passages concerning him [in the book be] suppressed."

"No one ever threatened the existence of Mr. Wolin's book." But on February 10, 1992, Derrida himself wrote to John D. Moore, director of the Press, asking him to promise never to republish the interview and threatening that, if such a promise were not forthcoming, "we should have to demand . . . that all copies of *The Heidegger Controversy* be withdrawn from sale, including the first edition."

"No one ever threatened the existence of Mr. Wolin's book"? In fact, as Sheehan has shown beyond doubt, Derrida, "for the basest of reasons, forced Richard Wolin's book out of print." For many years now, our premier literary critics have been teaching themselves and their students to see the world in quotation marks, to deny that there is such a thing as intrinsic literary merit, objectivity,

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truth, facts, reality. Derrida's latest eruption —and the collusion of his admirers—provides a sterling illustration of what these ideas mean when they are translated into what the rest of us think of as the real world.

Marian Anderson, 1897-1993

The death of a great performing artist, especially at the age of ninety-six, cannot be, in personal terms, of very great musical effect. In the case of the beloved contralto Marian Anderson, who died last month in Portland, Oregon, her musical effect will continue because of the many wonderful recordings from her prime she left behind. It is, after all, one of the ironies of recordings, pointed out by Thomas Mann in a trenchant passage in *The Magic Mountain*, that in them reposes an artist's best self; next to the greatness of what is enshrined in recordings, the personal is no more than merely contingent.

Miss Anderson (as she preferred to be called) was born a Negro and in the last years of her life became—whether she liked the change we shall perhaps never know—a black or perhaps even an African-American. Her early career, begun in 1925 by winning a New York Philharmonic audition, hardly took off in the United States; like so many American artists, then and now, Caucasian as well as colored, she had to go to Europe to find fame. Find it there she did, and when she returned to her own country in 1935 under the aegis of the brilliant Russian-Jewish impresario Sol Hurok, it was to a triumphant Town Hall recital. From that moment on she was an American star. That fact was not realized by the Daughters of the American Revolution, who in 1939 refused her the opportunity to sing at their Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C.; instead, at the invitation of the Roosevelt administration, she sang at the Lincoln Memorial for a live audience of seventy-five thousand and a radio audience of millions.

But racial prejudice continued to keep her out of opera in the United States, and it was not until 1955, in the twilight of her career, that she sang in Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* at the Met. She continued to give recitals, and in them her beloved combination of German *Lieder* and Negro spirituals brought tears to the eyes of a vast public. At its best —and that was for more than a quarter-century—her rich, solid, and always perfectly produced voice communicated both a glorious sound, the soul of the music, and a noble personality.

Indeed, the word "noble" is perhaps the one that now seems chiefly to apply to Miss Anderson and our memory of her. She was hardly unaware of the indignities she and her people had suffered and were suffering—how could she be? But those indignities, and worse, she converted, by some alchemy of the spirit, into the seriousness of her art, and into the transcendent dignity of her bearing. The most touching and oft-quoted story about her (as told by Sol Hurok) is that when she asked her mother what gift she might want from her successful daughter, her mother answered that "all she wanted was that God would hold Marian Anderson 'in the hollow of his hand, and raise up the people to be kind.'"

Doubtless there will be those racial activists who, cowed for the moment by the love in which Miss Anderson was held not just by music lovers but by all Americans, will confine themselves to saying properly eulogistic things about her. But then some will begin to whisper that this great artist "sold out," that her proper role was not singing white music for a largely white audience. There will be those who will say, in an ever more strident and hateful way, that her real place was on the barricades. But Miss Anderson was vastly stronger than all her detractors, past and present, white or black; she was a great artist, and a great woman. Our country will miss her healing presence.

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Feeling sorry for Rosalind Krauss

by Roger Kimball

Art happens, however, to be a matter of self-evidence and feeling, and of the inferences of feeling, rather than of intellection or information, and the reality of art is disclosed only in experience, not in reflection upon experience.
—Clement Greenberg

He only thought it respectable to talk about their art.
—Rosalind Krauss, criticizing Greenberg

Authors really should scrutinize publishers' blurbs carefully before allowing them to appear on their books. Although presumably written to flatter and extol, such endorsements sometimes contain uncomfortable truths. Consider, for example, the blurb that accompanies *The Optical Unconscious*, Rosalind Krauss's latest contribution to the annals of academic art theory.[1] "Rosalind Krauss," we read, "abandons the historian's voice of objective detachment and forges a new style of writing in this book: art history that insinuates diary and art theory, and that has the gait and tone of fiction."

A great deal might be said about that sentence. First, there is the element of exaggeration. It takes only a quick look at *The Optical Unconscious* for anyone familiar with Miss Krauss's earlier essays and books to realize that the blurb-writer is, well, stretching things. Little if anything is "new" here, in style *or* substance. Miss Krauss, a founding editor of the ferociously solemn quarterly *October* and lately appointed Professor of Art History at Columbia University, has simply returned once again to her favorite themes in this book, themes that have earned her a prominent place in the demimonde of chic academic theorizing.

Billed as "a pointed protest against the official story of modernism," the six, untitled chapters of *The Optical Unconscious* deal with the same knot of ideas that Professor Krauss mooted a few years ago in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* and *L'Amour Fou: Surrealism and Photography*. Once again she is spooring after (as she put it in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*) "a demythologizing criticism" that supposedly will "void the basic propositions of modernism" "by exposing their fictitious condition." Max Ernst, Georges Bataille, Marcel Duchamp, Jackson Pollock, and other Krauss regulars are re-enlisted in the project of discrediting—or *deconstructing*—modernism. As before, they are strained through the forbidding argot of the two Jacques—Lacan and Derrida—Melanie Klein, Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Walter Benjamin, et al. "Phallicism," the *informe*, "part-object," the "paranoiac-schizoid scenario of early development," "the mirror stage": all our old friends have come back for an encore.

Professor Krauss even uses many of the same decorations with which she festooned

1 *The Optical Unconscious*, by Rosalind E. Krauss; MIT Press, 376 pages, $24.95.

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earlier volumes. Bataille's photograph of a big toe, for example, which I like to think of as her mascot, reappears. As does her favorite doodle, a little graph known as a "Klein Group" or "L Schema" whose sides and diagonals sport arrows pointing to corners labeled with various opposing pairs: e.g., "ground" and "not ground," "figure" and "not figure." Professor Krauss seems to believe that this device, lifted from the pages of structuralist theory, illuminates any number of deep mysteries: the nature of modernism, to begin with, but also the essence of gender relations, self-consciousness, perception, vision, castration anxiety, and other pressing conundrums that, as it happens, she has trouble distinguishing from the nature of modernism. Altogether, the doodle is a handy thing to have around. One is not surprised that Professor Krauss reproduces it many times in her new book.

There is one novelty, though. That is the delicious phrase "the optical unconscious," adopted (with a bow to Fredric Jameson's slogan "the political unconscious") from Walter Benjamin. "*I started calling the hare I was chasing over this historical terrain* anti-vision," Professor Krauss explains. "*But that* anti *sounded too much like the opposite of a* pro *the all too obvious choice for which would be* pro-text. *Which was not at all the case of what I was tracking. The name that gradually took over was the* optical unconscious."

One need not read far in *The Optical Unconscious* before realizing that Professor Krauss has, with arresting frankness, hit upon the perfect title for her book. Few books claiming to deal with art can be more optically unconscious than *The Optical Unconscious*. Professor Krauss is to be commended for this bit of truth-in-advertising. But why the flurry of italics? This, I believe, is intended to "insinuate" diary, as the syntactically challenged blurb-writer put it. Much of *The Optical Unconscious*, especially in the first three chapters, is set in italics to give it the aura of a journal entry. Whether we are actually being treated to Professor Krauss's journal entries is difficult to say. One hopes for her sake that we are not.

But all the italics do remind us about her having abandoned "the historian's voice of objective detachment." Impish readers might wish to point out that Professor Krauss, like so many of her academic peers today, has long made it a point of honor to deny that anything like "objective detachment" is possible. So it is difficult to see how at this late date she can really be said to have *abandoned* it. Nevertheless, everyone can agree that *The Optical Unconscious* lacks the quality of "objective detachment." Does that mean that it possesses the "gait and tone of fiction"? If the tread of a hippopotamus is what was meant, then yes, *The Optical Unconscious* has the "gait of fiction." In any event, it certainly possesses another feature often claimed for fiction: any resemblance to real characters or situations is entirely coincidental.

Lest this seem overly harsh, consider how Professor Krauss begins her polemic against modernism. Her book opens thus:

> And what about little John Ruskin, with his blond curls and his blue sash and shoes to match, but above all his obedient silence and his fixed stare? Deprived of toys he fondles the light glinting off a bunch of keys, is fascinated by the burl of the floorboards, counts the bricks in the houses opposite. He becomes the infant fetishist of patchwork.

One writer called Ruskin "the most analytic mind in Europe," a judgment that Professor Krauss finds laughable. "The most analytic mind in Europe," she scolds, "did not even know how to frame a coherent argument. The most analytic mind in Europe produced *Modern Painters*, a work soon to be known as one of the worst-organized books ever to earn the name of literature." What is true of great artists and writers is also true of great critics: in commenting on them we do not so much judge them as judge ourselves. Professor Krauss cannot forgive Ruskin for lavishing such undistracted attention upon the visual world. She turns one of the greatest critics of the nineteenth century into a figure of fun because he had the temerity to pay at-

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tention to what he saw instead of theorizing about it. Ruskin survives undiminished from Professor Krauss's vignettes. Does she?

> *I start with a square. In its upper right corner I write* figure *and in its upper left I write* ground. *I want this square to represent a universe, a system of thinking in its entirety, a system that will be both bracketed by and generated from a fundamental pair of oppositions. This of course* [!] *is the universe of visual perception, the one that is mapped by a distinction between figure and ground. . . .*
>
> *Vision as a form of cognition. As a form, then, it reworks the very notion of ground. The ground is not behind; the ground is what it, vision, is. And the figure, too, is reworked. Perception marks this figure that the eye singles out by labeling it "pure exteriority": set off from the field on which it appears, it is even more surely set off from me, the beholder. But cognition—in vision—grasps the figure otherwise, capturing it in a condition of pure immediacy, yielding an experience that knows in a flash that if these perceptions are seen as* there, *it is because they are seen by* me; *that it is my presence to my own representations that secures them, reflexively, as present of myself.*

There are pages and pages of this in *The Optical Unconscious*: Rosalind Krauss talking to herself about herself. It is amusing to contemplate what John Ruskin would have made of it.

There is, however, a thesis lurking behind these soliloquies. Professor Krauss's main idea here—as in earlier works—is that the standard histories of modernism have, like Ruskin, overemphasized the purely visual and the ideal of artistic autonomy. She proposes to correct the record by reintroducing the dark side of modernism: the libidinous, chaotic, irrational, occluded. To this end she draws heavily on Dada and Surrealism—movements considerably more notable for their proclamations about art than for any art works proper. It is better to get it in her own words, though. For example, in place of Ruskin's exacting practice of self-conscious observation Professor Krauss praises the idea, drawn from Max Ernst, of "mechanical *seeing*," of "an autonomist motor turning over within the very field of the visual. This idea," she tells us, "which would come to operate at the center of surrealism's critique of modernism, contests the optical model's schema of visual self-evidence and reflexive immediacy, substituting for this a model based instead on the conditions of the readymade, conditions that produce an altogether different kind of scene from that of modernism's." We can admit, anyway, that this has precious little to do with modernism.

One problem with Professor Krauss's new history of modernism is that, as history, it isn't very accurate. She presents the idea of aesthetic autonomy as a distinctively modernist innovation, something that came along with the likes of Ruskin. In fact, the ideal of aesthetic autonomy dates back at least to the mid-eighteenth century. The German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, who coined the term "aesthetic," wrote in his *Reflections on Poetry* that "the poet is like a maker or a creator. So the poem ought to be like a world," i.e., self-contained, ordered, autonomous. One has no sense, in Professor Krauss's account, that the achievements of modernism have their place in an artistic tradition going back to the Enlightenment and beyond.

Among much else, this ahistorical history of modernism tends to transform everything into a species of caricature. Professor Krauss is only really at ease when she has reduced the subject at hand to a formal schema of some sort. This is one reason that she is so attracted by psychoanalytic theories from those of Freud and Melanie Klein to those of Lacan and Gilles Deleuze. The drastic simplifications presupposed by the rhetoric of "drives" and "stages" and "complexes" has an irresistible appeal for a mind ill at ease with genuine complexity. The down side is that all such speculations are ruthlessly Procrustean: much is occluded in the name of recovering the occluded, not least the emotional pulse and aesthetic texture of art: human, evanescent, real.

What we are left with is a twilight realm in

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which rootless abstractions war bloodlessly with one another. For example:

> *Would it be possible to modify the L Schema as the basis for mapping a visuality that both subtends and subverts the field of modernist vision in the same way that Lacan's psychoanalytic circuitry erodes the structuralist relations from within? For if the mirror relation as it is graphed in the L Schema divides the subject from the unconscious, by driving a wedge of opacity through the diagonal center of the graph, it is nonetheless true that the subject is the effect of the unconscious, or what needs now to be called a "subject-effect."*

And here she is on Lacan's notion of "the castrative status of weaning":

> *Suppose we were to try to graph this relation. We might start by characterizing the primal appearance of the object within the infant subject's perceptual field as the advent of something that separates itself out from a hitherto undifferentiated ground to become distinct as* figure. *That object, which is the mother's breast—and by extension the mother—becomes a figure, of course* [of course!], *by dint of its withdrawal from the contiguous field of the infant, by virtue of setting him up no longer as the amorphous and all-inclusive subject of satisfaction but now as the subject of frustration and longing, the subject, that is, of desire.*

This is pretty thin gruel, as Professor Krauss must realize. Like many contemporary academic "theorists," she seeks to compensate for the choking airlessness of such musings by punctuating every observation with a hint of violence or risqué sex. Hence, you see, "the castrative status of weaning." What, after all, can that possibly have to do with modernism? Or art? Or "the visual"? (One might, in fact, want to ask what castration has to do with weaning, but that is for another day.)

Naturally, all this is supposed to be daring and "transgressive." In small doses it can be quite hilarious. The long-term effect, alas, is tedium. How extraordinary to be told by Lyotard that "Con celui qui voit." (Here's looking at you, kid.) Professor Krauss is obviously deeply impressed by Lyotard's formula, for she repeats it often. "There is," she assures us in one place,

> no way to concentrate on the threshold of vision, to capture something *en tournant la tête*, without siting vision in the body and positioning that body, in turn, within the grip of desire. Vision is then caught up within the meshes of projection and identification, within the specularity of substitution that is also a search for an origin lost. *Con*, as they say, *celui qui voit*.

Some more than others, surely. Still, how amazing that, in simply taking a photograph, Man Ray "enacts the institution of the fetish: the 'glance' that refuses what it sees and in this resistance turns black into white, or rather, insists that black *is* white. In the logic of the fetish the paradigm male/female collapses in an adamant refusal to admit distinction, to accept the facts of sexual difference." Gee. And poor Roger Fry. Like Ruskin, he thought that art had something to do with the way things looked. In lecturing, Professor Krauss tells us, "*Fry places himself in front of the projection screen as he places himself before the chessboard. An eye without a body. Pure giver of form. Pure operation of the law. Pure phallus.*" Pure baloney is more like it.

One gathers that Professor Krauss included so many imitation journal entries in *The Optical Unconscious* partly in an effort to imbue the book with something more personal than off-the-shelf art theory. And there is no reason to doubt that her personality shines through clearly in those passages. Whether one can really call the result "personal" is perhaps another question. In the end, though, the gimmick of italicized text serves two larger purposes. In the first place, it allows Professor Krauss to avoid responsibility for the ideas she floats. After all, can one really criticize a journal entry, which is addressed primarily not to the public but to the writer's own conscience and memory? And second, it allows her to settle some old scores with unusual malice. Professor Krauss presents her argument with modernism as a brave epistemological-political adventure:

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she is the daring liberator of thoughts and feelings that have been deliberately neglected by orthodox modernism. In fact, her argument is primarily an argument with a few individuals, chief among whom is Clement Greenberg—yet another critic who, like Ruskin, believes that experiencing a work of art is a pre-requisite for critical appreciation and understanding.

Professor Krauss began her career as one of Greenberg's disciples. She wrote her dissertation on David Smith at Harvard under his influence and, later, her essays in *Artforum* bore the stamp of his approach. But that was before Professor Krauss emerged as a minor academic celebrity in her own right. Since then, she has striven to distance herself from Greenberg and everything he stands for. Her rejection of the visual component—in other words, the experiential basis—of criticism is only the latest step in a rebellion that has been unfolding for at least two decades now. We can gauge the pathos of that rebellion by the "gait and tone" of her last chapter.

Professor Krauss begins by recounting her impressions of Greenberg as he appeared recently in a television interview. It is not a pretty picture. She speaks of his "flabby and slack face," "the domed shape of the head, bald, rigid, unforgiving; and the flaccid quality of the mouth and lips." She also dwells on the "arrogance of the mouth—fleshy, toothy, aggressive." It is an extraordinarily cruel vignette—all the more extraordinary for being repeated, with slight variations, five or six times in the course of the chapter. Among much else, Professor Krauss coyly hints that Greenberg was implicated in Jackson Pollock's psychological crisis in 1951, a crisis that sent him back to drinking, effectively ended his development as a painter, and culminated in his demise in a drunken car crash in 1956. In truth, Greenberg did more than anyone to establish Pollock's reputation. If he judged that Pollock had "lost his stuff" by 1951, that was a judgment that history supports.

As she does with other central figures in the history of modernism, Professor Krauss diminishes Greenberg by caricaturing him. The cartoon character she fabricates could never have become the formidable presence that Greenberg was for decades. Her list of grievances is long, beginning with the fact that, even now, Greenberg is immensely more influential and important than she. Above all, perhaps, she cannot forgive him for insisting that art is a "matter of self-evidence and feeling . . . rather than of intellection or information." Rosalind Krauss knows nothing of "self-evidence and feeling." For her, art unfolds in precincts far removed from the immediate claims of feeling. She criticizes Greenberg for concentrating on the *art* of the artists he knew and wrote about—"He only thought it respectable to talk about their art"—largely, one suspects, because she does not see what all the fuss is about.

It is easy to be exasperated with Rosalind Krauss. She is pretentious, obscurantist, and mean-spirited. Enjoying a position of great academic respect, she has, through her writings, teaching, and editorship of *October*, exercised a large and baneful influence on contemporary writing and thinking about culture. In the end, however, one's exasperation is likely to be mixed with pity. Here is a woman who has devoted her professional life to art and ideas but who clearly has no feeling for art and for whom ideas are ghostly playthings utterly cut off from reality. In the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates remark that "to be deceived about the truth of things and so to be in ignorance and error and to harbor untruth in the soul is a thing that no one would consent to." No doubt Rosalind Krauss would scoff at the idea of possessing anything so quaint as a soul. But she must, from time to time, wonder what her beloved Lacan and Derrida have to do with life, what her Klein Groups and castration fantasies and "psycho-atmospheric-anamorphic objects" have to do with art. Why, she must wonder, do other people seem to care so much about art and beauty when to her it is all an arid, narcissistic battleground? It is pathetic, really. Her writing and ideas are pernicious, but one cannot help feeling sorry for Rosalind Krauss.

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Why should we read Joyce Cary?

by Bruce Bawer

"Joyce Cary?" said a friend recently when someone mentioned the author of *Mister Johnson* and *The Horse's Mouth*. "Now there's a name I haven't heard in decades."

Alas, the name of Arthur Joyce Lunel Cary (1888-1957) is one that many readers born after World War II may never have heard at all. How, an admirer of Cary must wonder, can one explain this unfortunate obscurity? A large part of the reason for it may be that Cary's sixteen novels aren't easy to place on most current maps of modern English fiction. In many ways, indeed, Cary doesn't seem especially modern. He wasn't a technical revolutionary in the manner of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf; nor did he write bluntly sardonic critiques of twentieth-century society, as did Evelyn Waugh and Aldous Huxley; nor did he shock readers, à la D. H. Lawrence, with dark and dangerous visions of primitive carnality. On the contrary, in a time when British and American novelists alike were avidly experimenting with fresh literary modes and sympathetically exploring newly minted systems of values, Cary wrote novels that recall such pre-modern masters as Defoe and Smollett, Fielding and Sterne, Dickens and Thackeray, and created sympathetic characters whose moral positions can, to contemporary readers, sound awfully Victorian. Certainly many of his convictions fail to accord with the received ideas of today's academy. For one thing, he was (in his own way) profoundly religious; for another, his opinions on Third World issues—he wrote several novels about Africa—would not nowadays be considered politically correct. (Cary was, as it happens, a harsh critic of civilized people who naïvely celebrate the primitive.) In a time when writers are acclaimed for their distinctive and unchanging "voices," even Cary's remarkable versatility of tone, diction, cadence, and perspective may be regarded as a strike against him in the literary-immortality sweepstakes.

Admittedly, if Cary were an artist on a level with, say, James Joyce or Henry James or Joseph Conrad, these characteristics might not count against him so heavily. But in fact he does not quite merit inclusion in their company. His novels are the product not of an extraordinary flowering of native genius but of a fascination with his fellowman, a compulsion to communicate certain strongly held ideas about the species, and (perhaps above all) remarkable industry and perseverance. A sense of literary form did not come naturally to Cary: his typical novel is loosely structured, held together mainly by the central character's sensibility or voice (for many of his books are in the first person); the problem with this is that some of his characters are less compelling than others, and some of his novels consequently rather dull and desultory. He rarely soars, rarely seems to burn with a hard, gem-like flame. Indeed, Cary appears to have been the sort of author for whom being a High Modern priest of literature was not only beyond his gifts but essentially inconsistent with

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his steady, sensible Anglican temperament.

Yet though he was very much the convention-bound Oxbridgean, Cary was admirably willing and able to look and listen—and learn. His novels feel less parochial than those of, say, Woolf or Pym or Amis *père*. While he believed passionately in the civilized values for which Britain stood, Cary didn't have that common British tendency to see other peoples as falling short in various ways from some taken-for-granted British ideal. Of the other British writers who are roughly of his generation, one might think to compare him to Somerset Maugham, with whose finest novel, *Cakes and Ale*, Cary's own best books share certain estimable qualities: lucidity, grace, a first-rate insight into human behavior. Like Maugham in *A Summing Up*, Cary in his prefaces to the uniform Carfax edition of his novels (named for the Carfax tower at Oxford, his alma mater) can be charmingly frank about his own methods and failings. Yet Cary goes deeper than Maugham, is empathic where Maugham is ironic, attends more to ultimate meanings. Both made use of exotic settings, but Cary was more interested in (and was better at) understanding the natives on their own terms. If with George Orwell, moreover, Cary shared a devotion to liberty, an unblinkered view of political passion and ideology, and an ability to write about these matters in direct, authoritative language, Cary is more attentive than Orwell to moral ambiguities. In most respects, too, he is surely superior to E. M. Forster, whose thinking about freedom and morality often seems silly and superficial alongside Cary's. Though Cary was, indeed, engrossed in questions of philosophy, politics, and art, his finest novels explore these things as functions of human thought and feeling; for him, ultimate truths are to be discovered not by seeking out hard facts or inflexible codes of behavior but by scrutinizing and attempting to comprehend the equivocal operations of the human heart and mind.

To be sure, it pleased Cary to call himself a "metaphysical novelist." Yet this is misleading: his most accomplished novels are never about abstractions in and of themselves, but about people. Yes, his novels do concern themselves frequently with the distinction that Cary perceived between "truth" and "facts"—but this distinction mattered to him only insofar as it illuminated human relationships and ethical judgments. In *To Be a Pilgrim* (1942), for example, the narrator, Tom Wilcher, discusses his family's indignation at the crimes for which Sara, his maid and mistress, has been incarcerated: "This is what they believe, and the facts are true; yet they believe a lie. The truth is that when Sara came to me I was a lost soul. . . . My faith was as dead as my heart." Time and again in Cary's novels, one is confronted with the implicit proposition that the only fair way to judge another person is according to the "truth"—that is, the way things look from that other person's vantage point—and not the bare, objective facts. It is not always clear at the end of a Cary novel which character, if any, he wishes us to consider the most morally upright; what *is* always clear is that Cary has prompted us throughout to fix our attention on his characters' moral impulses and intentions—their love, their faith, their fellow-feeling.

The apparent roots of many of Cary's thematic preoccupations stand out prominently in the story of his childhood and young manhood. Born in Londonderry in 1888, Cary was the scion of a distinguished Anglo-Irish clan that had come down in the world; his mother belonged to one of the city's most successful families. (Interestingly, her banker father was named James Joyce.) Shortly after Cary's birth, the family moved to London, where his mother died of pneumonia when he was nine years old. His father married again, and Cary became attached to his stepmother, only to lose *her* to pneumonia when he was fourteen. These deaths caused Cary (who had been raised an Anglican) to lose his faith; they also doubtless help to account for the inveterate boyhood mischief-making that he celebrated in his two novels about children, *Charley Is My Darling* (1940) and *A House of Children* (1941).

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These deaths also gave Cary an intense early awareness of the precariousness of life and of the constancy of change, which became one of his principal themes. As Wilcher remarks in *Herself Surprised* (1941), life is a battle, "and the trouble is the enemy goes on changing his uniform and his plans." Wilcher further observes in *To Be a Pilgrim* that

> we are the children of creation, and we cannot escape our fate, which is to live in creating and re-creating. We must renew ourselves or die; we must work even at our joys or they will become burdens; we must make a new world about us for the old does not last. . . . Those who cling to this world must be dragged backwards into the womb which is also a grave.
>
> We are the pilgrims who must sleep every night beneath a new sky, for either we go forward to the new camp or the whirling earth carries us backwards to one behind. There is no choice but to move, forwards or backwards.

It is implicit throughout Cary's fiction that since change is inevitable, man must strive to influence that change, so that the good may be preserved and the bad obliterated. While Cary took pride, then, in his family history and revered the Western cultural heritage, he also felt that the successful man, far from living in the past, "swims gaily on the surface of life," like the eponymous Nigerian clerk in his novel *Mister Johnson* (1939). Indeed, Cary came to see an acceptance of change and a willingness to take decisive action as wellnigh sacramental acts. "What is faith," asks Wilcher, "but the belief that in life there is something worth doing, and the feeling of it?" Similarly, Chester Nimmo declares in *Prisoner of Grace* (1952): "To look forward—that is the only way, that is the true forgiveness. The forgiveness of God is in the life of the soul, the everlasting fountain of His grace, renewed every moment." For Cary, moreover, change is at the heart of any real human relationship: in order for two people to live together happily and productively, they must change each other. As Nina Nimmo observes in *Prisoner of Grace*, "People who live together can't help changing each other—everybody in the world is 'corrupting' everybody else." One of the lovelier passages in *Mister Johnson* concerns a young couple, the Rudbecks, both of whom have come to feel that they are ill-suited to each other and that "their life together, apart from the routine satisfaction of various appetites, has become a series of mild depressions and mild deceits. They have no idea that they are in process of constructing a relationship so complete and delightful that, in another year or two, each will be indispensable to the other, that in twenty years, their friends will say of them, 'What a lucky couple—so exactly suited to each other.'"

The story of Cary's young manhood testifies both to a sometimes reckless-seeming hunger for creative fulfillment and to the underlying levelheadedness and dedication that would mark his career as a novelist. At the age of fifteen, during a trip to France, Cary became "an ardent convert" to Impressionism and resolved to be a painter. Two years later, he settled in Paris, where he loitered in cafés with other young would-be artists, then moved on to Edinburgh, where he took up the serious study of art and eventually decided to switch to literature. After attending Oxford (where he earned a Fourth), Cary traveled in 1912 to Montenegro to observe the Balkan War, expecting to take notes for a novel; instead, he made headlines by surviving a deadly arsenal explosion without injury. His notoriety as a result of this episode helped Cary to secure, in 1913, a position as an assistant district officer in the Nigeria Service. In this job—which would play a crucial role in shaping his literary vision—Cary functioned, in his own words, as the "Lord of some 10,000 square miles, mostly deserted bush." At first he displayed the usual British condescension toward the natives: indeed, even three years after his arrival he still saw them as childlike and untrustworthy. "No black man is morally, or mentally, or even physically reliable," he complained in a letter home. The harshness of these views (though they were common enough among colonial officials of the time)

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may be accounted for, in part, by the fact that Cary's role as tax collector, policeman, and judge exposed him largely to the baser elements of the local populace.

After being assigned to conduct a census and survey of the Borgu region, however, which brought him into regular contact with ordinary native families, Cary developed a deep respect and compassion for them—and, in addition, a contempt for the views of certain anthropologists who, according to the narrator of his second novel, *An American Visitor* (1933), believe "in the Golden Age, the noble savage, and all the other resuscitated fantasies of Rousseau." This book, one of the four early novels that Cary set primarily in Africa, was inspired largely by an encounter with a young American woman whose counterpart in the book declares that, because the Birri district's primitive culture has been protected from "so-called education" and "the development of finance," the natives "are probably the happiest and wisest people in the world." This woman is blind to the poverty and violence of the region, whose inhabitants' sympathies are, she says, "as quick and true as the instincts of animals, they feel as suddenly as dogs that know across a room's length when you think of them. They feel your look and turn at once their smiling faces like flowers to the sun." Such sentimental, patronizing attitudes infuriated Cary, who recognized that tribal practices perpetuated famine, that the natives' ingrained passivity made creative self-fulfillment well-nigh impossible for them, and that English-style colonialism was thus not entirely a bad thing. While his notorious temper could cause him to complain that "there is no government in the world so mean as the British—so mean, so time serving, so short-sighted, so hypocritical," he also recognized that many of his colleagues had entered the Nigeria Service out of a sincere desire to serve the natives and had made real sacrifices in order to do so.

Cary's African sojourn helped shape his belief in the importance of freedom to capitalize on one's imagination and creativity. It also helped restore his faith (though in a form that few churchmen would consider orthodox) and to instill in him an appreciation of faith's ability to spur people to create, to achieve, to make the most of their minds and talents. As he explained in the Carfax preface to *The American Visitor*, in his view both authority and the kind of exuberance that can seem defiant of authority should be esteemed:

> the faith which lies beneath anarchism is just as necessary to the world as the reason which creates systems of law.
>
> If none had ever rebelled against the law in the name of freedom, we should still be living in the stone-age under the tyranny of some juju priest-king or tribal Politburo.
>
> And the modern democratic state *has* developed by something like a natural course of events, and it *does* pursue, however erratically, the good life for its people; it *does* hate war.

For Cary, in other words, the value of Western democracy was that it had struck something like the proper balance between authority and freedom, between respect for the past (history, he wrote, "reveals to man his own soul") and appreciation of those who strive to Make It New.

Wounded in the African campaign in World War I, Cary returned home to England, married his longtime long-distance sweetheart, Gertrude Ogilvie, and in 1919 began to earn a living by publishing stories in the *Saturday Evening Post*. During the 1920s he made dozens of unsuccessful stabs at novel writing, his most notable project being an ambitious narrative about one Cock Jarvis, an Englishman in Nigeria (whose initials, it might be noted, were Cary's in reverse). Through Jarvis's experiences as an intelligent, principled imperialist Cary sought to explore the moral complexities of colonialism. (Though this novel was never completed, a collection of draft fragments was published posthumously in 1974.)

It was in his four early novels of Africa, published between 1932 and 1939, that Cary established his abiding theme: the subjectivity of individual experience and moral

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concepts and the consequent moral ambiguity of every human relationship. "All moral problems are unique," Cary once wrote, and at least one critic has complained that for Cary no one is evil and that his position must therefore be considered amoral. On the contrary, Cary's position is that it is in the nature of human beings to confuse objective moral judgment with subjective prejudice. Each of us has a moral nature, but in each of us it is distorted in different ways, by different personal factors. To say that every moral situation is unique is not to be amoral; it is to say that we all suffer from our own imperfections and that, strive though some of us may to do right, it is not given to each of us to see the right in exactly the same way; each sees as through a glass, darkly (though, to be sure, through different glasses, some of which are darker than others). To judge someone else fairly, one must walk around in his or her shoes—must, that is, identify and take account of the subjective elements that contribute to that person's understanding of the world. To do this is itself a moral act.

Which explains, in turn, why fiction is itself, to Cary, a moral act—because this is precisely what his best fiction does. If he wrote so many novels in the first person, it is because a large part of his purpose is to underscore the difference that it can make to attempt to look at other people's lives through their eyes. Indeed, in many a Cary novel the narrator's explicit intent is to "set the record straight" on some matter. *Herself Surprised*, for instance, is Sara Monday's attempt to explain how she, a decent woman, ended up in prison; and Nina Nimmo writes *Prisoner of Grace* because, having learned that "'revelations' are soon to appear about that great man who was once my husband," she wishes to defend him by placing those "revelations" in what she deems the proper biographical context. She and other Cary protagonists, moreover, frequently advert to the importance of such subjective considerations in moral judgment. When Nina and Chester lock horns in *Prisoner of Grace* over their son's education—Chester insisting that it would be hypocritical for him, a socialist, to send his son to a "good school," and Nina arguing that to do otherwise would not be fair to the boy—Nina says that they're both right. "How can we both be right?" Chester demands. "I don't know," Nina says, "but that's what I feel."

Since it was the extreme discrepancy between English and Nigerian attitudes and assumptions that had helped alert Cary to the moral ramifications of subjectivity, it is hardly surprising that the interactions of Europeans and Africans proved to be good material for four early novels in which he explored this theme. The last—and by far the best—of these novels is *Mister Johnson*. Narrated in the present tense, it contains one of the two or three most memorable of all Cary's characters. Mister Johnson, the clerk to Rudbeck, the Nigeria Service's assistant district officer in Fada, is a good-natured eighteen-year-old native who "likes everybody who gives him the least excuse to do so." Though he routinely prevaricates about minor matters and embezzles small sums, these infractions (as Cary depicts them) seem almost innocuous because they are symptoms not of shiftiness but of exuberance, and because Johnson is a genuinely selfless, uncalculating soul: when he steals, he invariably spends the money on others; when he lies, he "believes every word as soon as he invents it." It is a measure of Cary's accomplishment that Johnson is both thoroughly credible and thoroughly attractive—certainly more attractive than Blore, the district officer, who despises Johnson for his vitality. ("All exuberance alarms him," says Cary of Blore, "as if he feels in it, from Nature itself, some threat to established things.")

Cary's prose here is deceptively simple and transparent; the story feels real, fresh, and honestly observed throughout, and long after reading the book one retains a powerful sense of the people and their world. One never has the impression that Cary is pressuring one to feel a certain way about them, to take either the "English side" or the "Nigerian side." There are, in fact, no sides

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here: the minor English and Nigerian characters run the moral gamut, and Johnson, Rudbeck, and Rudbeck's wife, Celia, are all "round characters" (to borrow Forster's term) with their share of virtues, quirks, and blind spots. Though Cary does not go in much for long descriptive passages, one acquires a very vivid sense of Fada, whose people, he writes,

> would not know the change if time jumped back fifty thousand years. They live like mice or rats in a palace floor; all the magnificence and variety of the arts, the ideas, the learning, and the battles of civilization go on over their heads and they do not even imagine them. . . . An English child in Fada, with eyes that still see what is in front of them, would be terrified by the dirt, the stinks, the great sores on naked bodies, the twisted limbs, the babies with their enormous swollen stomachs and their hernias; the whole place, flattened upon the earth like the scab of a wound, would strike it as something between a prison and a hospital.

Celia is no child, however, but an adult for whom, Cary notes, Fada "is simply a native town. It has been labelled for her, in a dozen magazines and snapshots, long before she comes to it. Therefore she does not see it at all. She does not see the truth of its real being, but the romance of her ideas, and it seems to her like the house of the unspoilt primitive, the simple dwelling-place of unsophisticated virtue."

If it is a good thing that Cary's Nigerian sojourn provided him with a potent theme and with an arresting milieu for the novels of his apprenticeship, it is also a good thing that after *Mister Johnson*—which represents a clear advancement from apprenticeship to genuine mastery—he abandoned Nigeria as a setting. For in these novels the contrasts between characters, however rich and realistic, are based largely on class, race, and national background, and are thus essentially inconsistent with Cary's objectives: he didn't want to make a statement about race or class but about the human individual. Indeed, most of Cary's novels of the 1940s and '50s are picaresque, each chronicling part of its protagonist's colorful, change-filled life. Among the more captivating of these novels are *Herself Surprised*, *To Be a Pilgrim*, and *The Horse's Mouth* (1944), which make up the first of Cary's two trilogies. Describing this as Cary's "existential trilogy" (its somewhat less satisfying successor is generally labeled his "political trilogy"), the critic Michael J. C. Echeruo classifies these books' respective protagonists, Sara Monday, Tom Wilcher, and Gulley Jimson, as "man [*sic*] feeling, man thinking, man creating."

Andrew Wright, who with Cary's close cooperation wrote the first book-length study of the novels, notes that this tripartite structure is exemplary of a pattern that runs through Cary's entire *oeuvre*: "The man who must create, the man who must preserve, and the woman who as female resembles both the one and the other but also differs from either—these are the types to which Cary mainly confines himself because, for all their singularities, they constitute in Cary's world the defining limits of human possibility." Another critic, Dennis Hall, answers the complaint that Cary's characters are "types" by making the valuable (if overly sweeping) suggestion that we view them as "quasi-allegorical characters designed to enable Cary to explore the problems encountered by the human qualities they personify." One might add that it is possible for the protagonists of strong, significant novels to seem dangerously close to stock characters and yet be three-dimensional. To be sure, when one reads Cary's novels in sequence, the recurrence of this triangular pattern underlines its artificiality and strikes one as an obvious sign of his limitations as an artist and observer of society; yet none of his works, when examined individually, seems particularly crippled by it (though one might suggest that this motif helps to explain why Cary's women tend to be more convincing and fascinating than his men).

Sara Monday is arguably the most engaging of Cary's creations: a modern Wife of Bath and a fan of the pious Victorian novelist

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Charlotte Yonge, Sara is a bawdy and exuberant woman of humble birth who has a prodigious "love of pleasure," who has in her time "been both mistress and maid," and who feels that "happiness . . . is God's most precious grace." Though "swimming gaily" on life's surface, she is not unaware of the water's depths, the ever-threatening undertow: "God," she says, "strikes when you least expect and His wrath is terrible." After marrying above her station at a very young age, she is devastated by the death of her first baby; yet she gives birth to more children, and at the age of twenty-three finds herself happy, rich, fulfilled. "I gave myself up to the sweet world," she says, yet "at my very worst, and when I least expected it, the fear would strike me like a cold shiver, and I would say God is not mocked. Then, indeed, I would wonder at my lightness and my folly."

Among the first of Sara's follies is sleeping with Mr. Hickson, a millionaire friend of her husband, Matt, who says of Hickson that he "was worthy to be rich because he was a noble-minded man, and set the things of the spirit above the body"; Sara, for her part, says of Hickson that "I believe he knew the map of my whole soul better than myself." (The frequent cartographic images in Cary's work remind one that mapmaking was among his major assignments in Nigeria.) After Matt's death Sara moves on to a common-law marriage with Gulley Jimson, an egocentric painter whose career both Matt and Hickson have attempted to nurture, and then to a job as servant and occasional bedmate to the rich, devout, and vaguely disreputable Tom Wilcher. Just as Mister Johnson doesn't think of himself as a liar and a thief, so Sara doesn't see herself as a woman of easy virtue: if she falls easily into bed with men, it's because she doesn't want to hurt their feelings or raise a fuss about matters that she considers technicalities. Likewise, if she pilfers small sums from Wilcher (either to squirrel away for a rainy day or to help out Jimson and his new consort) and fibs (falsifying her age, for example, on a job application), she doesn't consider herself a liar and a thief: like Mister Johnson, she views such practical considerations as negligible in the scheme of things.

For all her transgressions, in fact, God is never far from Sara's thoughts; and coarse and conversational though it may be, *Herself Surprised* is permeated with a powerful sense of the holiness of the everyday. It is no coincidence that Cary—who conveys Sara's distinctive combination of earthiness and godliness with great credibility—often describes her worldly pleasures in spiritual terms: "I always loved to be rowed on water, for the feel of that wonder; all that weight of boat and people floating upon the air as you might say, for it seems but thicker air; and so smoothly as an angel might slide in the air." It is clear that Sara has learned from life: she knows (and abides) the folly of youth, saying of Wilcher's young nephew that "[i]f Bobby was sometimes rude to Mr. W., it was not out of unkindness, or socialism, but only because of what he could not know, which makes all the young ones impatient with our old dilly-dally." And she knows what temptation can be: on first hearing rumors of Wilcher's degeneracy, it occurs to her that if he "is even as bad as they say, . . . he may be better than most, having greater temptation and a harder fight." The novel's title derives from Sara's characterization of her feelings when, as a very young woman, she agreed to marry Matt: "All that evening I was surprised at myself." Such, to Cary, is the nature of life: if one is really living and growing and contending with change—if one is *living*, in short—one will constantly be surprising oneself.

Sara is, in a sense, at the center of Cary's first trilogy. For both Wilcher in *To Be a Pilgrim* and Jimson in *The Horse's Mouth*, she serves as a touchstone, a point of reference. Though crediting her for his spiritual rebirth, Wilcher faults Sara for her "resolution to have her own way. . . . She was as persistent as a natural force." Jimson (in one of his many unacknowledged borrowings from William Blake, his literary hero) echoes this thought, after his own fashion: "Life delights in life. Especially with Sara." Yet he observes that

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Sara "could commit adultery at one end and weep for her sins at the other, and enjoy both operations at once. She wasn't a woman —she was a bag full of women, and everyone worse than all the others."

In their own ways, both Wilcher and Jimson are religious. Wilcher is a devout Christian, while the "abashless" (Sara's word) Jimson is something of a pantheist: "You're Mrs. Em and I'm Gulley Jimson and that fly on the wall has its own life too—as big as it likes to make it, and it's all one to God as the leaves to the tree." Wilcher is an intriguing character (more intriguing, alas, than his story); as for Jimson, though he is probably the most celebrated of all Cary's creations, it must be said that in his case the accusation that Cary's protagonists are mere clichés seems at times quite defensible. As rude and irresponsible as he is obsessed with painting, Jimson too often comes off as every middlebrow's idea of a serious artist. Part of the problem is that time has not served him well. He is meant to be an extravagant embodiment of the idea of artist as existential creator and destroyer, and his disparaging remarks about the culture's self-conscious sanctification of art are supposed to be daring, provocative: "[A]nyone who goes in for art deserves what he gets." "What is art? Just self-indulgence. You give way to it. It's a vice. Prison is too good for artists." Told that artists give their lives to art, he replies: "And other people's lives. Like Hitler." Yet in an age of artists whose desire to shock and to seem outrageous has taken them to extremes of which the likes of Jimson could hardly have conceived, he can seem rather tame and tiresome; in fact, Sara is more consistently interesting on life and love, and Wilcher more consistently interesting on being a Christian and a householder, than Jimson is on art and the artist's life.

This is not to deny, however, that Jimson is a marvelous achievement—one might even say a marvelous performance. For Cary *becomes* Jimson. From the first sentence of *The Horse's Mouth* to the last, Jimson's energetic, arrogant, smart-alecky voice never falters. Throughout both of his trilogies, indeed, Cary's signal achievement—extraordinary in the first trilogy, admirable in the second—is his versatility, his ability to inhabit the minds and speak in the voices of such extremely different people: an imprudent and imaginative man, a stubborn reactionary, and a big-hearted woman who loves them both. There are, to be sure, important distinctions between the two trilogies. If Sara Monday is a lower-class sort who weds above herself, the second trilogy's Nina Nimmo is a young woman of gentle birth who, finding herself pregnant by her childhood sweetheart, Jim Latter, gives her baby a father by marrying the low-rent Chester Nimmo, a class-obsessed radical-left politician. The baby, a boy, is named Tom, and *Prisoner of Grace*, the first novel of the trilogy, is most involving when it explores "the battle for Tom's soul" between Nina and Chester, who eventually attains a high position in government and is widely despised. The trilogy's second novel, *Except the Lord* (1953), fills in Chester's background as the son of a devout shepherd who believed that "[t]he weak must be forgiven because they are weak." Though often tedious, the novel contains some striking passages, such as the following one, in which Chester recalls his father's effect on the children:

> My father had never lost his temper with us, never beaten us, but we had for him that feeling often described as fear, which is something quite different and far deeper than alarm. It was that sense which, without irreverence, I have thought to find expressed by the great evangelists when they speak of the fear of God. One does not fear God because he is terrible, but because he is literally the soul of goodness and truth, because to do him wrong is to do wrong to some mysterious part of oneself, and one does not know exactly what the consequence may be.

"Almost every great statesman," Cary once noted in an essay, "has been described as a crook." It is hard not to connect this observation to his portrait of Chester, about whom many a reader may wonder: is he a

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statesman or a crook? A man of faith or a religious hypocrite? A humble servant of the people or an egomaniacal self-seeker? One point of the trilogy—and, indeed, of Cary's entire *oeuvre*—is that, given the moral intricacies of the human soul, such questions oversimplify. For Nina, surely, Chester is at once idealistic and ambitious, at once a good and loving man and a calculating tyrant. Though she never ceases to love him, she is also capable of hating him—and hatred is a subject about which she has a few things to say. It is, she reflects, "more like an illness than a thought." It is a "dangerous place." "Helpless anger is frightening," she observes, because "it makes one remember the injustice going on everywhere all the time which at any moment may flood over oneself and drown one in poison."

And what of love—the force that, in spite of all their disagreements and misunderstandings, irrevocably binds man to woman and friend to friend in one after another of Cary's major novels? If hatred is illness, love is health; if anger recalls injustice, love enables individuals to bridge the barriers of subjectivity and judge one another more fairly. ("What is more delightful in this world," asks Chester, "than the new-found sympathy of two full souls?") At the thematic heart of all of Cary's major novels lies a belief in human affection as the fundamental fact of life, as something that demonstrates the existence of a God who is "the ground of love, beauty and goodness." Love, in Cary's view, is a powerful thing: out of it can spring not only the human sympathy that makes possible moral understanding, but also the energy that enables men and women to imagine alternate lives, to effect change, and to create things of beauty that touch in some seemingly transcendent way upon the deeper meanings and higher purposes of life. Could it be that the discomfort of many contemporary tastemakers with such ways of thinking about life and art has played a part in Cary's steady posthumous removal to the margins of modern British literature? Perhaps. And perhaps it will take a major change in the cultural situation to restore Cary, the connoisseur of change, to something like his rightful place on the twentieth-century bookshelf.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

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"The Greek Miracle": Classical sculpture at the Met

by Beryl Barr-Sharrar

Writing about a Greek marble head in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts seen during his 1904-5 visit to the States, Henry James said it had been well worth crossing the Atlantic to see the genius of ancient Greece in American light. "[T]o the *raffiné* of almost any other clime," he wrote, "I should say . . . that he has not *seen* a fine Greek thing till he has seen it in America." In the daylight-flooded, circular upper gallery of the Lehman wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, visitors to an exhibition of forty-eight original Greek marbles and bronzes from the sixth to early fourth centuries B.C. can judge for themselves the aptness of such a notion today. "The Greek Miracle: Classical Sculpture from the Dawn of Democracy" [1] is the first major loan exhibition of Greek antiquities in New York since "The Search for Alexander," with its works from fourth-century B.C. Macedonia, opened at the Met in October 1982.

Twenty-two of the objects are from museums in Greece and ten from European collections: the Louvre, the British Museum, the Munich Glyptothek, the Antikensammlung of Berlin, and the Capitoline Museum in Rome. Apart from three small works lent by private New York collectors, the significant number remaining (thirteen) belong to the Met itself. It is to be hoped that one of the corollaries of this exhibition will be the recognition that there are a few more than two original works of fifth-century Greek sculpture in this country (*pace The Washington Post*, November 22, 1992, and *The Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 1993).

This is not to say that the extraordinary loans from Greece are not the core of the exhibition. There are very few antiquities in American collections of an importance equal to the least of these twenty-two pieces from museums in Olympia, Samos, and Athens (the National Archaeological Museum, the Acropolis, the Agora, and the Kerameikos). But the Met's eight marbles and five bronzes included here not only hold their own but make a substantial contribution. This is especially apparent at both ends of the omega-shaped installation, which opens with the museum's strong-limbed, stony kouros of *c.* 600-580 B.C., a miraculously well-preserved example of the earliest of these Archaic male figures, and closes with a group of marble grave monuments which includes the Met's great funerary lion, its lekythos of Kallisthenes, and two of its stelai (one fragmentary with only a woman's head in high relief, the other with a serene and

1 "The Greek Miracle" was organized by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in collaboration with the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Greece. It was seen at the National Gallery (November 22, 1992-February 7, 1993) before traveling to the Met (March 11-May 23, 1993). A catalogue, edited by Diana Buitron-Oliver, has been published by the National Gallery of Art/Harry N. Abrams (164 pages, $45; $25 paper).

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elegant woman whose leaning image may reflect a contemporary Aphrodite), all carved around the beginning of the fourth century B.C. The museum's fine Parian stele from the mid-fifth century, with its little girl and her two pet doves, also appears in the exhibition.

The sculptures brought from Greek and European museums join these already transplanted treasures of antiquity to be seen in New York light, thousands of miles from their original setting and disconnected from their past and local landscape. A glimpse of their local landscape can be seen near the entrance to the exhibition in the enlarged nineteenth-century photograph of the Athenian acropolis, where several of the marbles in the show were discovered while the foundations of a museum were being built on the site in the mid-1860s. (Excavations were not systematic until 1882.) One is the so-called Kritios Boy of about 480-470 B.C., a carved figure of surpassing beauty and a key monument in the development of the Classical style because of its asymmetrically balanced pose and correctly rendered anatomy. (He is named after a sculptor known to have made, with Nesiotes, a figure whose head bears a superficial resemblance to his own.)

A second is the Athena sculpted by Euenor and dedicated by Angelitos (as an inscribed base, a column left in Athens, tells us), a less glamorous and engaging figure than the erotically suggestive Kritios Boy, and unfortunately now headless, but a superb example of the Early Classical (or so-called severe) style of the early fifth-century. Another photograph taken on the Athenian acropolis around 1865, coincidentally on view in the early photography exhibition at the Met,[2] pictures the Angelitos Athena and the torso of the Kritios Boy somewhat casually grouped *en plein air*, with the famous Archaic calf-bearer and the head of Athena from a late-sixth-century B.C. gigantomachy pediment, sometime after their (separate) excavations. The head of the Kritios Boy was found some twenty years after the torso in the photograph, and the lower left leg was also added later. While it is a privilege indeed to see these two marble figures in the museum on the acropolis, perhaps a matter of yards from where they might once have stood, the opportunity for direct confrontation with them, in exhilarating proximity and in new and neutral circumstances, surely compensates for their detachment.

The intimacy some viewers seek with great works of art, including those of antiquity, may well be intensified when immediate historical environs are removed. Henry James had seen Roman copies of Greek sculpture in Italy and knew the Elgin marbles; he never went to Greece. But behind his comments quoted above was the belief that art is in some way a constant, with value apart from its temporal and geographical context—and where better to recognize that value than in distant, ahistorical, early-twentieth-century America? For James, conceding "the most merciless case of transplanting," the solitary presence of the head (of a fourth-century B.C. Aphrodite), "as lonely a jewel as ever strayed out of its setting," doubly increased her value, for "what she essentially stands for, she here stands for alone."

The two carved marble architectural components of temples on view at the Met are a special case. The metope from the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, its emphatically solid figures carved in the big, bold, lucid shapes of the Early Classical style, depicts impending drama in Herakles' fulfillment of the last of his labors. The mighty hero gazes down into the cupped hands of the approaching Atlas, in which lie the apples of the Hesperides which will give him immortality; Herakles must release the weight of the sky to his youthful patroness Athena long enough to take the fruit from Atlas, who can then resume his burden. In its original setting, the figure of Herakles would have been seen bearing on his cushioned shoulders the weight of the stuccoed and painted lintel of the inner temple porch above him to suggest

2 "The Waking Dream: Photography's First Century. Selections from the Gilman Paper Company Collection" opened on March 25 and closes July 4.

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the sky (a motif adopted by vase painters).

The carved surface of the massive Pentelic block from the north frieze of the Parthenon depicts in the limpid linearity characteristic of High Classical relief the motion of spirited horses well under the control of their riders. These horsemen, of course, are only a small part of the 160-meter-long sculpted frieze which ran entirely around the cella, or central area of the building, of which 70 percent is cavalcade steadily gathering speed as it moves toward the east. In its original setting, the frieze, painted with colored encaustic and embellished by metal horse trappings, could be seen best from outside the temple's outer colonnade, but only between the columns. There was undoubtedly a sense of drama in the very act of catching glimpses of it here and there as the speed of the horses increased.

Both reliefs are installed in the Lehman wing at eye-level. How, in a museum gallery, to accommodate sculptures intended to be seen from below and at a distance is a problem which concerns custodians of these works as well as borrowers. Though the authentic viewpoint is from the ground looking up, the desire to draw near to the artist's own experience is authentic, and is at least as old as Pericles' purported visits to Phidias's workshop. In the case of much Greek architectural relief, as well as much architectural sculpture, the distancing required by its subordination to the needs of the structure of a building did not discourage artists from expending great efforts on detail and finish. In fact, the artistic control over the shallow overlapping planes that suggest depth in the Parthenon frieze is perhaps best appreciated from close range.

As a contained unit of narrative, the Olympia metope in the show (the best-preserved) can be read without reference to the other labors of Herakles in the series, though one misses details like the aging of the hero from one metope to another. Despite the fact that the horses are cut off at both edges, the relief on this Parthenon frieze block is effective enough compositionally, like those on most of the Parthenon frieze blocks, for modern viewers to find it satisfying independent of its original context. Indeed, specialists believe that the majority, if not all, of the frieze blocks were carved separately, then put in place. That *some* of the north and south frieze blocks *may* have been carved *in situ* is suggested solely by overlapping figures, but only the final carving of these may have awaited their placement.

The luxuriously draped late-fifth-century relief figure of Nike, whose huge wings help maintain her balance while she unbinds her sandal, was an indication for those who approached the temple platform within her walls to bare their feet. For transport to the U.S., her relief block has been removed from what survives of a three-sided balustrade on which was carved a whole entourage of graceful wing-furling Nikes, building trophies and leading bulls to sacrifice. They formed a protective wall around the small Ionic temple on the high bastion south of the Propylaia on the Athenian acropolis. The Nike's appeal from a little distance is assured by the deep folds and clinging drapery that articulate the forms of her sturdy body underneath, but well under life-size in scale, she invites a closer look. This is not true to the same extent of the large early-fourth-century headless and armless running Nereid from the Athenian agora. A roof ornament, or *akroterion*, with similarly "wet" drapery, this figure makes her best, and intended, impression in a stunning view from across the open well of the Lehman wing.

The smaller scale of another running figure, this one from the early fifth century, is perhaps enough to demand its close scrutiny. Originally elevated in a small temple pediment, the sweet-faced Archaic girl from Eleusis, probably Hecate running with a torch in each hand, amply rewards attention. The artist's insistence on freeing the figure's elegant pointing foot from the marble block is nothing less than bravado (the other foot, now lost, was carved separately and added). This virtuoso carving releases her arm from its sleeve, and continues in the brilliant cascades, ripples, and rows of schematic folds

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on the peplos she wears, and in the detailed coiffure, to which separately fashioned marble or metal curls were added over the nape of the neck. The back of the piece, while flat, is finished with a lovely scalloped hem and folds on the mantle which would not have been seen when it was in place in the pediment. This demonstration of skill was not simply an attempt at verisimilitude to please the gods: very likely it was the fruit of *competition* within the craft, a commitment to excellence, an important and pervasive aspect of Greek life.

Nothing expresses the competitive spirit among artists in ancient Greece more explicitly than the famous jibe written by the late-sixth-century B.C. vase painter Euthymides on his red-figured amphora now in Munich: *hos oudepote Euphronios* ("as never Euphronios!"). Excepting the fact that, like Euenor of Angelitos's Athena, sculptors were frequently satisfied enough with their accomplishment to sign the base (a kind of commemoration of success), we have no comparable surviving testament to the rivalry of sculptors. Yet we may imagine that the mastery of marble carving manifest in works in the exhibition was pitted against similar mastery in others. Competition among sculptors could do much to explain the apparent extraordinary rapidity with which the uniform and rigid stance of the Egyptian-influenced Archaic stone kouros could be radically changed conceptually, allowing the achievement of asymmetrically balanced bodies in stone like the Kritios Boy as well as, presumably, bronzes considerably larger than the Early Classical statuettes of athletes, gods, and heroes in the exhibition. (The life-size bronze head of Apollo here, once in the Chatsworth collection, might be imagined on an enlarged body similar to that of the statuette installed nearby of the youth making a libation.)

This quite momentous change was undoubtedly encouraged, if not actually affected, by the modeling of clay preliminary to the casting of bronze, the preferred medium for free-standing figures by sometime early in the fifth century B.C. On the amphora of which Euthymides was justifiably proud (dated about 530-520 B.C.), a figure whose body is drawn from the back and in three-quarter profile seems to turn into space, an innovation in the two-dimensional rendering of the human body. While artists in both mediums could not know exactly where such experiments would take them, they were far from unconscious of their achievements.

For viewers at the end of the twentieth century, perhaps the most difficult of Greek sculptural styles to appreciate is the High Classical (beginning about 440 B.C.), in which changes in the figure, its asymmetrical balance achieved, are directed toward the "idealization" of its proportions (and demeanor). Before 440, one can find in some works of the Early Classical period expressive distortions of anatomy for the sake of visual effect that seem very modern. For example, the exaggeratedly long arms of the famous Artemision Zeus (deemed too precious to travel to the U.S. for the exhibition) add great visual excitement to the dynamic equilibrium of the figure; the single-plane containment of Myron's discus thrower, whose pose is completely artificial yet evokes the entire procedure of throwing the discus, seems to compress and condense the action. (The work exists in Roman copies only.)

We can interpret these Early Classical sculptures in the language of modernism, and respond to them in the same way as those artists who invigorated the classical tradition in the early years of this century but eschewed the Neo-classicism of the academy. (Matisse mentions the discus thrower in his *Notes of a Painter*, 1908.) Like others called "primitive" in the early days of modernism, the Greek Archaic style also has a more direct appeal in the twentieth century than the High Classical, and was highly appreciated by artists. (In his studio at Nice-Cimiez, Matisse had a plaster cast of Kleobis, one of the "twin" kouroi from Delphi.)

It is probably to a large extent familiarity with Neo-classical sculpture of the late eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries

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which distances viewers today from the Greek Classical prototypes. Misread as realism or construed as "idealism" in the sculptors' own terms, the proportions of the originals were revised into denaturalizing formulations which were believed to stand for "high truth." This is as true of Antonio Canova, whose appreciation of the Elgin marbles extended to his firm refusal to touch them for restoration, as it is of artists of much lesser gifts. Equally distracting from the High Classical style for contemporary sensibilities are the intellectual attitudes projected during the last century onto even the *whiteness* of Greek marbles ("peace," "purity," etc.) by those Victorian Hellenists, heirs to Winckelmann, who maintained the moral superiority of Greek Classical sculpture. Joshua Reynolds even deplored the Greek application of color to marble as inappropriate.

Though we know the names (and sometimes the work) of other fifth-century sculptors contemporary to them, it was Phidias, with the great image of Athena and the Parthenon, and Polykleitos of Argos, who gave the new conception of the balanced human body a famous canon, who dominate this period. (Phidias may well have had his own canon.) Like the expressively altered body, hints of emotion in the faces of some Early Classical sculptures (seen clearly in centaurs) also seem to disappear. Some viewers today find a lack of passion in High Classical works, and dislike the repeated typology (like the heads on the Parthenon frieze). Transitions from styles are not inevitable like laws of evolution, and the character and personality of Phidias, in his role as Pericles' appointed overseer of the Parthenon, must be considered imprinted on most of what we see in that religious monument to the military and political might of Athens. In theory, when the building was completed in 432 B.C., many artists came down from the Athenian acropolis to find work elsewhere, carrying the conceptions and style of Phidias with them. Polykleitos's students likewise apparently scattered out of Argos.

The grave stelai in the exhibition reflect the stylistic influences of the two great artists by the late fifth century B.C. This is private sculpture, where the seriousness of face and weight of human presence characteristic of the High Classical figure, for all the prettiness of its outline (especially as it is developed by this time), has special poignancy. This commemorative sculpture can perhaps be said to be more legitimately isolated for our reflection than the architectural sculpture. Whatever the achievement or character of the depicted individuals, they were given some sort of permanence by these stones, just as the bronze images of young athletes dedicated in sanctuaries immortalized their physical achievements. (Though only men born of Athenian parents were citizens, which left thousands of residents of the city unenfranchised, including slaves and resident aliens, women were heroized on grave stelai.) The most obvious Phidian influence is perhaps the young man in high-relief profile, undoubtedly the dead, on the so-called "cat" stele from either Salamis or Aegina, who resembles figures on the Parthenon frieze, especially in the carving of his head. The unusual, almost photographic, placement of the two figures, the child—probably a slave—facing the viewer with a touching expression of restrained mourning, seems to emphasize the separation between the living and the dead.

The influence of Polykleitos can be seen in the more heavily proportioned naked figure of the youth on the fragmentary grave stele from Samos in the exhibition. The attempt to render a shift of the upper body in response to the weight-bearing leg in three-quarter view in relief suggests the artist knew the canonical stance of Polykleitos well. The daring carving to suggest the youth's body turning into space (the actual plane of the marble block inclines sharply from right to left) is a brilliant and unusual attempt at illusionism in relief. The fluttering fillet in very low relief on the background between him and the seated (male) figure adds a still deeper dimension of space, and the encaustic color originally painted on the stele may well have intensified these carved effects.

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A word should be said regarding color on Greek marbles, especially in view of the fact that reviewers of the exhibition have suggested it was "garish" or "vulgar." Truly garish nineteenth-century Beaux-Art *restaurations* and the Second Empire tastes they inspired were misleading on the subject of color in Greek architecture and its sculpture, and mistaken impressions apparently still linger. (The emulation of Beaux-Art historical eclecticism by postmodernists, with their proportional exaggerations of "spare parts" painted with Day-Glo colors, carries the distortion to extremes.) On the pediments of the Temple of Aphaia in Aegina, the ground was red and the background (the sky) blue. Shields had painted emblems, hair and eyes of figures were colored, clothing was patterned (a net pattern remains on the helmet of the elegant Aegina head from the east pediment in the exhibition). While the schematic, colored patterns on the body armor of the Aegina figures of Trojans were as busy as those on "Turkish knitted socks," to use the contemporary analogy of a German archeologist, informed opinion suggests it is unlikely that even the costumes of these Eastern exotics (the Greeks were, of course, naked) obscured the character of the marble, which "glows through and harmonizes the colors" (Martin Robertson).

The application of designs on fabric depicted in vase painting contemporary to the marble in question can help us imagine how extensively color might have been applied. While the simple planes of the peplos of the Athena on the Early Classical Olympia metope were surely colored, the fabric may have been decorated further only to the extent of borders of a different color, or perhaps an animal frieze. The rich ornamentation of the material of women's clothing in some vase painting at the end of the fifth century, on the other hand, as well as Greek fabrics from the same time preserved in South Russia, suggest that the voluminous garments worn by Hegeso on her grave stele in the exhibition may have been richly decorated. Even so, it is improbable that the complicated carving which depends on light refraction for its effect (the transparency of the veil Hegeso wears over her head, for example) would have been concealed.

"Classicus . . . scriptor, non proletarius" (Aulus Gellius, second century): The word "classic" seems to have been first used to distinguish the classic writer, who paid taxes, from those who served the state only with their offspring. It has not lost its meaning as a model or standard, but it has also become virtually synonymous with "ancient Greek and Roman." In discussions of Greek art, the word more narrowly describes, without aesthetic judgment, the art of the period in which artists may have been most active in developing rational systems of proportions and design, roughly 480-320 B.C.

As J. J. Pollitt says in the generally academically unambitious catalogue, there can be little doubt that Pericles wanted the Parthenon and his other building projects in Attica to serve in some way as "a tangible expression of his own vision of society." In our enlightened view of Periclean Athens, we deplore its economic base, its democracy's limited enfranchisement, its slavery, and its empire. This has naturally somewhat diminished our appreciation of Pericles' vision as expressed in his Funeral Oration, recorded by Thucydides. Also, since the more anthropological aspects of Greek culture have been acknowledged, beginning with the work of Jane Ellen Harrison and J. G. Frazer in the last century and E. R. Dodds in this one, an idealized image of Greek culture, like the one held by the Victorian Hellenists, is no more tenable than the belief that the Elgin marbles are the earthly manifestation of the invisible beauty sought in Plato's theory of forms. While for centuries all *non*-Greek art (even Hellenistic) was held up for comparison to a Classical Greek norm, it is now judged, more fairly, on its own terms. Pericles' Funeral Oration remains, however, not only the original but also perhaps the most humane statement ever made of the democratic ideal. This great humanity can be found in Classical art, and our response to that humanity preserves our access to Greek culture.

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A defense of translation

by Martin Greenberg

Translation's standing as literature is low. Even among the educated—who are not, today, the same as the cultivated and have limited acquaintance with other languages—it is thought of as a mechanical activity: the translator finds the word or phrase in his language that corresponds with the one in the foreign language and sets it down. Astonishment is the common reaction of such people when confronted with the wide disparities among translations of the same work. Astonishment is followed by some irritation and impatience; one is not getting what one bargained for: the original as it is in its own language but transferred to, duplicated in, one's own. Maybe what's needed is a super-computer. In its most prosaic function of passing along facts and information of every kind from one language to another, translation is indeed mechanical; in such translation, literalness and fidelity, here better called accuracy, go pretty much hand in hand. But in the translation of literary works, and especially of poetry, fidelity is a complex thing calling for the exercise of imagination, for transformation, not reproduction. A clarifying term has always been needed here. "Equivalence" is often used, but is, I think, too vague. I suggest "virtuality": a faithful translation gives one virtually—that is, in effect but not in fact, not literally and never in all respects—the original poem.

However, it is not only the uncultivated who are dismayed to find that the best that translation is able to achieve in bringing over a poem from one language to another is "virtuality." Shelley famously remarked in his *Defense of Poetry* that trying to translate a poem was like casting a violet into a crucible so as to discover the principle of its color and odor. In his new book, *The Poetics of Translation*, Willis Barnstone lists Benedetto Croce, Ortega y Gasset, Robert Frost, and Vladimir Nabokov, with Shelley, as being among the "great doubters" of verse translation.[1] Notice that these are names that don't go back to before the nineteenth century. This doubt about the possibility of verse translation wasn't something Roman, medieval, Renaissance, or the English Augustan poets felt, planted as they were without question in their own poetic sensibilities and styles and confidently transferring work of another style and language into their own. Frost said that translation gives you all of a poem but the poetry. Nabokov, that stylist, said that "the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase." He is quoted as calling his own (clumsily literal, almost unreadable) translation of *Eugene Onegin* "Dove-droppings on your [Pushkin's] monument."

Nabokov's violence of expression, doubly shocking for being committed against himself as translator, brings out the sense of violation that underlies the negative feeling about verse translation, the sense that trans-

1 *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice*, by Willis Barnstone; Yale University Press, 302 pages, $30.

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lations are an outrage committed on great originals. "Traduttore, traditore," goes the saying. Translation betrays; that's its nature ever since the Lord confounded the one language of mankind. Well, many times it does; but surely it doesn't always, surely we are not deluded when we honor as great translations poems we read with immense delight, often forgetting (in our feelings if not in our heads) that they are translations. There is a yearning absolutism in the denigration of verse translation, a disappointed longing for the tower with its top in heaven. On earth we translate and try not to betray the sense and spirit of the original. This doesn't mean sticking to the letter. The idea that being literal is being faithful is, as Professor Barnstone says, a stubbornly enduring misconception. And even when we do betray the original, even when we set out to betray it, it can be a fortunate betrayal. That fine poet Edwin Muir, not himself a translator of verse but of prose, and (with his wife, Willa Muir) still Kafka's best translator by far, doubted the possibility of translating poetry but saw an advantage in this.

> How to translate poetry, where the actual words, the music, and the movement signify so much more than they do in prose, I find it hard to understand. The verse translator obviously must be allowed far more freedom (including freedom to invent) than the translator of prose. Perhaps the final thing one can ask from a translation of poetry is that it should be a good poem in English. A prose translation rendered back into its own language should be quite recognizable as a cousin of its original. But Chapman's Homer, and Pope's, turned into ancient Greek, if that were imaginable, would not be Homer at all. Yet Chapman's *Iliad* is a great poem. There are advantages in this impossibility of translating poetry: scores of Homers and Dantes and Shakespeares and Goethes scattered over the world, all different while in their origin the same. Verse translation does sometimes produce great literature.

Another reason for the persistent low regard in which literary translation is held, closely related to the idea that it is an impossible undertaking, at least in the case of poetry, concerns its lack of originality. Translation is servile; it is a servant of the text it renders. If it departs too much from the text it is a bad servant. If the translator is a Pope turning the *Iliad* into an eighteenth-century English poem glittering with the dazzle of its rhymed couplets, he is a clever fellow who knows how to smuggle in his own poetic goods under the Homeric label. Nevertheless Pope's *Iliad* is Homer's too, a translation, and not simply another of Pope's poems.

> So many flames before proud Ilion blaze,
> And lighten glimm'ring Xanthus with their rays:
> The long reflections of the distant fires
> Gleam on the walls, and tremble on the spires.
> A thousand piles the dusky horrors gild,
> And shoot a shady lustre o'er the field.
> Full fifty guards each flaming pile attend,
> Whose umber'd arms, by fits, thick flashes send.
> Loud neigh the coursers o'er their heaps of corn,
> And ardent warriors wait the rising morn.
>
> —Book VIII

The distinction between creative poet and servile translator breaks down here, as indeed it breaks down in all good translation, whether close or free. The translator is a servant but not servile; his exercise of his imagination, that godlike liberating power, makes him free.

Willis Barnstone, a professor of comparative literature at Indiana University, has constructed a wide-ranging defense of the translation of poetry, based on broad, polyglot learning and practical translating experience. His *Poetics of Translation* has roughly three parts. One part has to do with translation as a universal activity, the elemental transformative and interpretive work of perception first of all, and then of "all thinking, writing, reading, and communication." In a sense the whole universe, and all literature with it, are translation. This perhaps serves to raise the dignity of translation, but, as he himself says, it is general to the point of vacuity and suggests nothing about a poetics of translation.

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Nor does modern translation theory, he writes, have much to say that affects, or is affected by, the practice of literary translation; it is all linguistics and semiotics, and often, my ignorant impression is, jargonizes the obvious. For this reason Professor Barnstone gives little space to translation theory, though rather too much of that space to Walter Benjamin's mystical-metaphysical nonsense about a pure, universal language to be recovered through uncompromising literal translation (interlinear gloss); the object of this language not being to communicate meaning but to exalt non-meaning into a heavenly "expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages," but which is meaningless in any one of the languages that make the earth a clamorous Babel.

The second part of Professor Barnstone's defense also has to do with translation's ubiquitous yet little recognized or little acknowledged presence, but now with what is usually called translations. His "paradigm" here, fascinatingly discussed at length, is Bible translation. Consider the New Testament: it is a translation into Greek from unknown "Aramaic oral and Hebrew written sources"; Jesus and the Jewish Christians of Palestine didn't after all speak and act in Greek. But when translations become sacred they turn into originals; any taint of second-handedness would derogate from their sanctity. So the New Testament becomes a first thing. Another kind of translation took place when "Christian exegetes read the Hebrew Bible . . . as Christian prehistory. The material text lies unchanged but . . . its meaning alters profoundly. By guided reading, misreading, and rereading, the Jewish Bible became [was translated into] a Christian document." And this is proclaimed by the strictly Christian terms of Old Testament and New Testament. Hebrew scripture is reinterpreted as the old, subordinated and superseded, witness to God's love of humanity in Christ, Christian scripture is the new, triumphant witness—although "testament" was a mistranslation into Latin of the Greek word in Mark for covenant (*diatheke*), which translated the Hebrew *berith* and was unaccompanied by the word "new." And before the New Testament the Hebrew Bible, too, itself the mother as it were of translations, was a translation—a grand compendium of every kind of translation, drawing on a multiplicity of Near Eastern sources "but concealing throughout its universal dependence." For it wouldn't do to see any of God's words as having first been uttered by Sumerian, Babylonian, Akkadian, or Egyptian lips.

Religious orthodoxy is horrified if a text that has become sacred should be violated by translation. There is a first-century Jewish writing that says three days of darkness descended on the world when the Law was translated into Greek. Saint Jerome's Vulgate translation gradually acquired the standing of an original and was made the official Catholic Bible; it could only be translated into a vulgar tongue (another "vulgar" tongue!) at the peril of one's life. The great translator William Tyndale, to whom the King James Version owes so much, owes its heart, was burnt at the stake in the sixteenth century for a heretic. At the end of the eighteenth century, orthodox rabbis denounced Moses Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch into German as being blasphemous. Modern revisions of the King James, which is aesthetically sacred today, are heatedly attacked for falling so far below the Authorized Version in beauty and strength. So they do; their language is painful, the more painful the more they depart from the traditional text. But I shouldn't for that reason wish them canceled. They are usefully consulted about the many obscurities and difficulties you find as you read along in the King James.

Secular literature, too, abounds with little acknowledged translation. "Euripides, Virgil, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dryden, and more recently Constantine Cavafy, Joyce, and Nikos Kazantzakis, all took earlier stories" and made them over into works of their own. "Since these were authors within well-defined civilizations, consciously following a tradition, they were performing the

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expected tasks of great original authors. They were, by the more ample medieval view, also translators." Shakespeare took from Geoffrey of Monmouth, Boccaccio, Gower, Chaucer, Marlowe, Sidney, Golding's translation of Ovid, North's of Plutarch, etc., etc.; the list is a long one. To do so today would get you sued. We are very conscious, in our entrepreneurial age, of literature as property and press its legal rights too hard. If you wish to quote a poem by Yeats you have to pay his heirs, though most poets would want to go on being quoted freely, the more the better, and damn all heirs. The beginning of one of Yeats's own poems, "When you are old and grey and full of sleep,/ And nodding by the fire," is taken straight from Ronsard's poem beginning "Quand vous serez bien vielle, au soir, à la chandelle,/ Assise auprès du feu . . ." At the end of the poem, I learn from Professor Barnstone, Yeats rephrased a line from another Ronsard poem that is a translation into French from Horace's translation into Latin of a Pindar ode. The current of tradition has run from Greek to Latin to French to English.

The current of tradition runs, whether the times are traditional or innovational, because literature is unalterably, irremediably traditional. And a powerful current within that current, recognized or not, is translation. Professor Barnstone rightly lays it down as a fundamental truth: "No one is absolutely original." The centuries-long growth of individualism has obscured in literature as in other things how dependent single selves are. It is instructive that the word "create" should now be commonplace. It used to mean something only God did when he created the world *ex nihilo*, that original production. But we creatures today create right and left, daily. The word is used much too loosely, though we can't do without it because it expresses the originating power of the human imagination. But that power is not absolute like God's, it depends on precedents, on what has come before it, on what lies around it. Original poems are original only in a relative sense. Yet when we call the power that brings them into existence "creative," there is a lingering suggestion of absolute power, the power to bring something into existence out of nothing. William Collins said in his *Ode on the Poetical Character* that the human imagination was born on the same day God exercised his imagination to make the world—"on that creating day"

> When he called with thought to birth
> Yon tented sky, this laughing earth,
> And dresst [it] with springs, and forests tall,
> And pour'd the main engirting all.

This ambiguous sense of the near-absolute power of the imagination is still with us. But since no such ambiguity attaches to the activity of translating, it seeming absolutely clear that it brings something into existence only out of something else, the modern disposition to deny translation important artistic standing is reinforced.

A great virtue of *The Poetics of Translation* is the distinctions it introduces into a very muddied subject. This is its third part. These distinctions are based on Dryden's fundamental classification of translations into metaphrase, paraphrase, and imitation. Metaphrase is literal translation; paraphrase a *via media* aiming at what I have called virtuality; imitation is free translation, adaptation, license. The author extends Dryden's classification (which he calls "translation level") into "structure, or degree of source text in translation"; and "authorship, or dominant voice." Structure and voice also run a gamut from close to free, from dependence on the original to independence. Of course these distinctions aren't hard and fast, nor do they denote artistic value. We find good and bad verse translations in any of these categories, even in literal metaphrase.

How, for example, does Robert Lowell's translation of Racine's *Phèdre* look in the light of these distinctions? First Racine's original; Hippolytus speaks the opening lines:

> Le dessein en est pris: je pars, cher Théramène,
> Et quitte le séjour de l'aimable Trézène.

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> Dans le doute mortel dont je suis agité,
> Je commence à rougir de mon oisiveté.
> Depuis plus de six mois éloigné de mon père,
> J'ignore le destin d'une tête si chère;
> J'ignore jusqu'aux lieux qui le peuvent cacher.

Now Lowell, translating these lines:

> No, no, my friend, we're off! Six months have passed
> since Father heard the ocean howl, and cast
> his galley on the Aegean's skull-white froth.
> Listen! The blank sea calls us—off, off, off!
> I'll follow Father to the fountainhead
> and marsh of hell. We're off. Alive or dead,
> I'll find him.

In this first speech, as in the whole play, Lowell doesn't proceed line by line but seizes whole paragraphs, whole chunks, in his fist and drastically remakes them with little regard for the particulars of the French. Looking at this speech, one would surely think we have here another of his "imitations" (as, following Dryden, he called them). But the story that Lowell's translation tells is still the story of *Phèdre*. The lines break out of the confines of Racine's lines, yet are still confined in Racine's story. So what is it, paraphrase or imitation? Both: in detail, an imitation; as a whole, a paraphrase.

In his structure, as in the sense of individual lines, Lowell is perforce free, using rhymed iambs rather than Racine's alexandrines; perforce, because there's no doing alexandrines in English. As for voice: has anyone, can anyone ever catch Racine's voice? What Lowell's translation has, as Racine so eminently has, is speed, though his own kind of speed. And the éclat of his lines is his own, not Racine's. This éclat, in Lowell's own poetry, often strikes me as put on. But a translator needs to "put on," to try for force with Racine, who is himself so forceful. Lowell's translation adds up to a very spirited version of Racine's *Phèdre*, though one unpleasing to pedants. It was ousted after some years from its position in the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* for a dreary, pedestrian version, I presume to placate the pedants concerned that students should "study" an "accurate" version of Racine's tragedy (they would need to read it in French for that); they are not concerned that students should read language having vividness and force. In America today great classical works are published for students, not for readers. In the large-scale economy of modern publishing, the number of such readers of classical works weighs little, the number of students weighs much. Hence the increased role of academic presses.[2]

How often in the matter of translated classics pedantry ousts pleasure! *Don Quixote*, for example, was translated with sparkling verve and humor in the eighteenth century by Peter Motteux for one and by Smollett for another. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century translations steadily improved in scholarship and steadily declined in verve. The latest that I know, Samuel Putnam's, done in the 1940s, at last succeeds in being boring. But finally after two centuries, what was plain to any reader—plain to me as a teenager laughing out loud over Motteux's translation—is now acknowledged against the pedants, and the eighteenth-century translations are being reissued. By all means let us have fresh translations of *Don Quixote*, but let us have them *fresh*.

Professor Barnstone has a section that is intensely interesting because of its concrete engagement with five translations of a poem by Sappho. The five are by Catullus, Horace Gregory, Lowell, Barnstone himself, and William Carlos Williams. Catullus's version is close to the Greek, we are told, although he changes the poem radically by making himself the speaker and introducing "Lesbia" (who is Sappho) as the name of the woman he is addressing. The lesbian love expressed in the original is thus turned into

2 And in trade publishing, the many-headed multitude weighs more and more and the minority of the cultivated weighs less and less.

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an expression of Catullus's love and veneration for Sappho. His translation, because he is the great classical poet Catullus and because more people read Latin than Greek, always figured as an original poem. Of course it is both: a translation, and a poem in its own right. That is what Professor Barnstone calls the "double art" of translation, good translation. Lowell classed his translation of Sappho's poem an imitation, which Barnstone disputes, in spite of some striking liberties Lowell takes (too striking, in my opinion, too eager to *strike*). The great, the startling beauty among the four English translations is William Carlos Williams's, who had the help of Greek-reading friends. It is truer to the original than Lowell's (Barnstone says), yet is very much a Williams poem. Here it is:

Sappho
That man is peer of the gods, who
face to face sits listening
to your sweet speech and lovely
laughter.

It is this that rouses a tumult
in my breast. At mere sight of you
my voice falters, my tongue
is broken.

Straightway, a delicate fire runs in
my limbs, my eyes
are blinded and my ears
thunder.

Sweat pours out: a trembling hunts
me down. I grow
paler than grass and lack little
of dying.

Williams's translation is what Dryden called a paraphrase. Dryden called his own magnificent translation of the *Aeneid* a paraphrase; in it he had "endeavored to make Virgil speak such English as he would have spoken, if he had been born in England, and in this present age." This did not lessen in any way his claim that what he had produced was Virgilian, the Latin epic rendered into English. As I understand him, Dryden is saying that his poem speaks English, but is not an English poem.[3] In our own age, his *Aeneid* looks very much like an English poem of a past age, the Augustan, and to that degree un-Virgilian—in short, it should now be called an imitation. It is time that has made the change. His English, for him, was as natural as the air; but for us, though its naturalness and ease are very striking, it belongs to history. Williams's Sappho poem, too, in a future age may look—and be—very much an American poem of a certain time and seem to lose in its Sapphic quality, lose in its virtuality. It won't, however, lose as a poem by Williams, just as Dryden's *Aeneid* doesn't lose as a work by Dryden. This is why every age needs to retranslate the classics for itself—to recover a nearer sense of the original. Nevertheless the great translations of the past continue to live on as great poems, even if losing something for us as translations.

Before passing on I should like to quote the example of an imitation or adaptation which makes a fine contrast with Williams's American paraphrase of Sappho. It is G. S. Davies's version of the Catullus poem

3 Translation enlarges one's own language by bringing into it modes of feeling and thinking not native to it, by which they become native. The Bible is a great example of this. Translations breathe a sense of another cultural world to a greater or lesser degree, in part reflecting the greater or lesser degree of cultural difference. But a good translator must have a solid basis of confidence in his own language. Recently, predictably, there has been some admonishment (I understand) of translators to "respect the otherness of the other," not to take a "patronizing" (colonialist?) attitude toward the foreign author. I know examples of works that have been "too Englished" in translation—that is inferior translating. But the overwhelming kind of failure in literary translation goes the other way, the way of bad, unnatural, unidiomatic English. Is this call to respect otherness a call to translate literally into unidiomatic English? If so, it's unnecessary. (See Peter France's review of translations of *La Princesse de Clèves* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, January 1, 1993.)

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"Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque." It sticks close to the sense of the original, but because of its structure: stanza, rhyme, and meter; and voice: Scots English, is purely English. It is not only a poem in English, it is an English poem, a Scots English poem.

Weep, weep, ye Loves and Cupids all
And ilka Man o' decent feelin':
My lassie's lost her wee, wee bird,
And that's a loss ye'll ken, past healin'.

The lassie lo'ed him like her een:
The darling wee thing lo'ed the ither,
And knew and nestled to her breast,
As ony bairnie to her mither.

Her bosom was his dear, dear haunt—
So dear, he cared no lang to leave it;
He'd nae but gang his ain smal' jaunt,
And flutter piping back bereavit.

The wee thing's gane the shadowy road
That's never travelled back by ony:
Out on ye, Shades! ye're greedy aye
To grab at ought that's brave and bonny.

Puir, foolish, fondling, bonnie bird,
Ye little ken what wark ye're leavin':
Ye've gar'd [made] my lassie's een grow red,
Those bonnie een grow red wi' grievin'.

What an enchanting poem! How it sings, because Scots English, closer than English English or American English to its past, can still sing in this way. William Carlos Williams's Sappho poem sings, too, in its way, beautifully. However, there is precious little singing left in American poetry today, which neither knows how nor wishes to sing. Who should have imagined that poetry, which sang before the history of the world began, would ever renounce the wish to sing!

The last sixty years in this country have been an outstanding period in translation, thanks largely to translations from the Greek and Latin classics. T. S. Eliot lit the fuse by his criticism of the translations of Euripides made by Gilbert Murray, the classics scholar and minor poet. Eliot assailed Murray for "stretching the Greek brevity to fit the loose frame of William Morris and blurring the Greek lyric to the fluid haze of Swinburne" —for writing superannuated language that came out of a superannuated sensibility. Americans took the lead in classics translation because American poetry led the modern movement in revitalizing the language of poetry. Some of the names are Dudley Fitts, Richmond Lattimore, Robert Fitzgerald, William Arrowsmith. They make a roll of honor. Fitzgerald's translations of Homer, especially, have been recognized as notable achievements. But scholarship, where a quasi-sacred text is concerned, sees the freedom of the imagination in translation as presumption, irreverence. In the course of a review of recent Homer translations, the eminent scholar Hugh Lloyd-Jones extols Richmond Lattimore as the premier translator of the Greek epics because of his greater fidelity to Homer's words and verse.[4] Lattimore, writes Professor Lloyd-Jones (quoting Lattimore himself), doesn't "rate his own word ahead of the word which translates the Greek," whereas Fitzgerald thinks he can improve on Homer; Lattimore's six-beat line gives a truer impression of Homer's swift-flowing dactylic hexameters (which are impossible to transpose into English) than the iambs Fitzgerald employs; and Lattimore, like Homer, is, as Fitzgerald is not, noble.

Professor Lloyd-Jones's standard is fidelity to the Greek, as he understands fidelity. I, who am Greekless, reading these translations as poetry in English, find that Fitzgerald is much the better writer. And in any rating of translation as art—art, which aims at giving pleasure—the best writing is what is best (barring egregious deficiencies in other respects). What does a comparison show? First Lattimore. I choose one of the

4 *The New York Review of Books*, February 14, 1991. The review pronounces this and other judgments with notable weightiness of manner—

"As who should say, 'I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark.'"

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passages cited by Professor Lloyd-Jones in his review. We are in Book I, Thetis has just appealed successfully to Zeus to have him back the Trojans until Agamemnon is compelled to restore the prize he has snatched from her son Achilles. Hera, suspicious of their private conversation, loudly protests, and the Father of the Gods has come down hard on her.

He spoke, and the goddess the ox-eyed lady
Hera was frightened
and went and sat down in silence wrenching
her heart to obedience,
and all the Uranian gods in the house of Zeus
were troubled.
Hephaistos the renowned smith rose up
to speak among them,
to bring comfort to his beloved mother,
Hera of the white arms:
'This will be a disastrous matter and not
endurable
if you two are to quarrel thus for the sake of
mortals
and bring brawling among the gods. There
will be no pleasure
in the stately feast at all, since vile things will
be uppermost.
And I entreat my mother, though she herself
understands it,
to be ingratiating toward our father Zeus,
that no longer
our father may scold her and break up the quiet
of our feasting.
For if the Olympian who handles the lightning
should be minded
to hurl us out of our places, he is far too strong
for any.
Do you therefore approach him again with
words made gentle,
and at once the Olympian will be gracious
again to us.'

Now, Lattimore's *Iliad* is very respectable work and broke a path for the modern translation of Homer. But I note, first, the unidiomatic tendency of so many phrases: "wrenching her heart to obedience" (line 2), "This will be a disastrous matter and not endurable" (line 6), "bring brawling among the gods" (line 8), "vile things will be uppermost" (line 9), "words made gentle" (line 15) instead of "gentle words"—to fill out the line, I suppose. Then there is an awkwardness in the syntax, which I shan't detail. The diction is plain as Homer is plain, but flat, needing more narrative specificity: the gods were "troubled"; "stately feast"; "our places." The six-beat lines are too long and give one a feeling of drowning in language. The lines run indeed, but rock, too, on the anapests. The lines run but the narrative lags; Fitzgerald, as we shall see, moves the story along with much more vigor. The overall effect, as a consequence of Lattimore's literalist bias, is solemn, stiff, ungainly. Lattimore has marked dignity, even call it nobility, but his nobility is tedious.

And now Fitzgerald.

At this the wide-eyed Lady Hera feared him,
and sat quite still, and bent her will to his.
Up through the hall of Zeus now all the lords
of heaven were sullen and looked askance.
Hephaistos,
master artificer, broke the silence,
doing a kindness to the snowy-armed
lady, his mother Hera.
He began:
"Ah, what a miserable day, if you two
raise your voices over mortal creatures!
More than enough already! Must you bring
your noisy bickering among the gods?
What pleasure can we take in a fine dinner
when baser matters gain the upper hand?
To Mother my advice is—what she knows—
better make up to Father, or he'll start
his thundering and shake our feast to bits.
You know how he can shock us if he cares to—
out of our seats with lightning bolts!
Supreme power is his. Oh, soothe him, please,
take a soft tone, get back in his good graces.
Then he'll be benign to us again."

How much more natural, more elegant is Fitzgerald's English! The verse has more vividness thanks to a more concrete diction and a bolder, more dramatic handling of the locutions. There is a smile in the verse, the smile that is always so charming in Fitz-

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gerald's Homer, especially in his *Odyssey*. I don't know if Fitzgerald is noble, but his verse has its own dignity. And last of all—or I should say first of all—Fitzgerald, like Homer, is a *storyteller*. He knows how to tell Homer's story.

Professor Barnstone, against Lloyd-Jones, writes that "Fitzgerald came as close to an accurate literal version [of Homer] as possible *without the least compromise with a profoundly aesthetic achievement*." He praises Lattimore's translation of the Gospels and Revelation as "a masterly instance of close translation"; but he finds that his Homer is freer than Fitzgerald's in the bad sense of "often padding to maintain tone and six-beat meter." We can see this in the passage I have quoted.

A last word about the presumption of "improving on" a great original. A translation is not the original. "Improvements" improve the translation, not the original, improve it as art. Anything that makes it better art is all to the good. A literary translation is a work of art. That must be the foundation principle of any poetics of translation. Which is the point of Willis Barnstone's very instructive book.

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Poems
by Louis Simpson & Greg Williamson

The Indian student

I said, "I can't talk to you
this morning, I'm very busy."
He jumped back two paces,
and smiled and said, "You have
a very pleasant irascibility."

I said, "Come to my house
on Saturday. You can tell me
everything on your mind, all at once."

So there we were, in my study,
with his father, the Sanskrit scholar
who died at twenty-three,
the uncle who kept a "dramshop,"
another uncle who was poisoned,
and a cousin named Maya . . .

"Stop!" I said. "Go back
to the uncle who was poisoned."
"Yes," he said, "by his mistress."

He spoke in a monotone
of the village where he grew up

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and, when he was a man, in Calcutta,
sharing a room above the market . . .
a shuffling all night long
going by, a murmur of voices.

*

A book came in the mail, from India,
cardboard covers and cheap paper,
Wings of Song by Sastri,
dedicated to his "friend and mentor."

In India when someone chooses you
as his mentor, from then on
you're in his debt, obliged
to help him . . . find him a job.
When he marries you're expected
to help support his family.

There's no end to it . . . the quarreling
next door. The sound of a flute,
and a murmur and shuffling.

All those people in the street
who stay up all night long.

—*Louis Simpson*

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The poet's pipe

I am a poet's pipe,
The modernistic kind,
Not a churchwarden type
But elegantly lined.

Straight stem and simple bowl,
No grinning Gothic skull,
Nor Chinese rigmarole,
Nor buxom Turkish trull.

I read him like a book
(e.g., I know just where
He got this poem. Look
In the pages of Corbière.)

"Cast off!" he shouts. "Full steam!"
Aye, aye. I'm burning red.
Life is a waking dream
Until he goes to bed.

His devils in dark swarms
Fly from my smoking spout.
Bright, intellectual forms
Are hovering about.

And then his light goes out.

—*Louis Simpson*

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A form of fulfillment

The slightest deviation from the norm
The auditors refuse to tolerate
Whenever one is filling out the form.

The room is cramped and smotheringly warm
Where one is working to eradicate
The slightest deviation from the norm.

All records, facts, and figures must conform
And must be clear, complete, and up-to-date
Whenever one is filling out the form.

The crackle of a sudden thunderstorm
May tempt a notary to contemplate
The slightest deviation from the norm,

But raindrops on the windowpane perform
A canticle one cannot duplicate
Whenever one is filling out the form.

Is such devotion to the uniform
A kind of love, that one would abnegate
The slightest deviation from the norm
Whenever one is filling out the form?

—Greg Williamson

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Art

Booked

by Jed Perl

The good news from the world of the deluxe illustrated book is that gigantism is dead. In the exhibition called "The American Livre de Peintre," [1] mounted at the Grolier Club in New York City and covering works from the past seventy or so years, most of the really outsized examples date from the 1960s and 1970s, and the show begins and ends with books that one can imagine holding in two hands. A reasonably sized illustrated book is not necessarily a good illustrated book, but a book that cannot even be opened except on a large empty table isn't a book that's easy to love. Not every book is going to be small enough to slip in a pocket or take to bed, but the magic of even the most deluxe illustrated book has in some way to be connected with our sense of a book as an enchanted universe between covers that we can close up, pick up, take with us. Robert Motherwell's *A la pintura* and Robert Rauschenberg's illustrations for a text by Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Traces suspectes en surface*, are all too evidently scaled to the dimensions of an exhibition case. These two monsters were produced under the auspices of Tatyana Grosman at her Universal Limited Art Editions in the glory days of the Sixties and Seventies, when just so long as there were some words and some pages, anything was okay. But apparently things have changed even at ULAE, where now, under the direction of Bill Goldston, they are doing such books as a positively intimate-scaled collection of etchings by Elizabeth Murray accompanied by poems by Ann Waldman and (slated to appear in the fall) an equally normal-sized collaboration by poet John Yau and painter Bill Jensen. At the very least small is the beginning of beautiful.

Book illustration is a vast topic, difficult to define, and the difficulty is evident in the very title of the Grolier Club show. "The American Livre de Peintre" may not be an oxymoron but it certainly sounds a little strange, which is not to say that one doesn't get the drift, the drift being that American artists have continued a line of development that goes back to Bonnard, Matisse, and Miró. In a brochure accompanying the Grolier show, Robert Rainwater refers to these books as "forms of expression by painters and sculptors," another awkward turn of phrase that was forced upon the writer by the inclusion of some nonbooks and a few antibooks in a show of illustrated books. There is nothing wrong with producing a volume so luxurious that logistics or economics necessitate an edition limited to a few dozen copies. The trouble is that production values all too often become an end rather than a means to an end. The wizardry of the printshop can make an artist forget that the spell cast by the greatest artist's book is only a grown-up's

1 "The American Livre de Peintre" opened at the Grolier Club, New York, on March 17 and is on view through May 15. A paperback catalogue, with an essay by Robert Rainwater, head of the Prints and Photographs Division of the New York Public Library, will be published in June by the Grolier Club.

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elaboration of the spell cast on the four-year-old by Babar or Dr. Seuss. This season has, in addition to the Grolier Club show, brought an interesting array of exhibits devoted to all manner of twentieth-century illustrated books. These include "Fables, Fantasies, and Everyday Things: Children's Books by Artists," at the Whitney Museum; "Message from the Interior: The Eakins Press Foundation," at the Zabriskie Gallery; "The Artist and the Book in Twentieth-Century Italy," at the Museum of Modern Art; and a show of Matisse's illustrated books at La Boetie, the gallery founded by Helen Serger and now operated by Monica Strauss. Taken together, these shows suggest a broad definition of the illustrated book. If the artist and the book designer know what's what, then something wonderful can be done even by a commercial printer in an edition of many thousands.

All the modern movement, with its mingled yearnings for the rarified and the quotidian, is reflected in the book arts. At one extreme there were the volumes published by Ambroise Vollard in editions of generally no more than three hundred copies, which only the well-to-do could afford, and at the other extreme there were the productions of the Russian avant-garde, designed to take advantage of inexpensive printing techniques and meant to be sold to the Everyman who visited the local bookshop. (Who actually bought them is another matter.) The line between esoteric and populist tastes and audiences was not always clearly drawn. After World War I, Jean Cocteau's great Editions de la Sirène published illustrated books with color plates by Léger and Dufy in editions of over a thousand copies. These books, hand-colored by means of the pochoir process, were apparently an attempt to provide the finest modern illustration to, if not the man in the street, then certainly a broad albeit sophisticated public. In England in the 1940s and 1950s, the serious Neoromantic artist John Piper produced lithographic illustrations for books that were published in large trade editions. And many of the great photographic achievements of the century, among them Albert Renger-Patzsch's *Die Welt ist Schön* and Henri Cartier-Bresson's *The Decisive Moment*, found their definitive form between hard covers and (originally) at reasonable prices. Most attempts to circumscribe the subject of the illustrated book end up looking a little odd. The charming show of "Children's Books by Artists," at the Whitney Museum from late November through the end of January, made a point of restricting the artists to artists who were not primarily known as children's book artists. Thus Everett Shinn was included while Maurice Sendak was not, a fact that ought to have made the organizers wonder exactly what they'd gotten themselves into. Yet there was much to see, including Ad Reinhardt's absolutely unReinhardtish illustrations for Ruth Krauss's 1944 *A Good Man and His Good Wife* and Joseph Cornell's perfectly Cornellian illustrations for Charles Henri Ford's 1940 *ABC's*.

Matisse is without a doubt the greatest artist to become fully engaged with book illustration in this century (and maybe any century). While there were Matisse books included in John Elderfield's retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, they were pretty much kept at the margins, so that it was helpful that there was, at least for the month of October, a show devoted to the illustrated books at La Boetie. (Elizabeth Phillips, a rare-book dealer who organized the La Boetie show with Monica Strauss, is co-curator, along with Tony Zwicker, of the Grolier Club show. This is a small world.) In the 1930s and 1940s, Matisse devoted large chunks of time and all the powers of his imagination to not only the illustration but also the typography and design of limited-edition books. These works range chronologically from the *Poésies* of Stephane Mallarmé, published by Albert Skira in 1932, to the 1947 *Jazz* portfolio and the 1950 *Poèmes de Charles d'Orléans*, both published by Tériade. In dozens of other instances Matisse produced prints, line drawings, and cover designs for books, catalogues, and magazines. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., in his 1951 *Matisse:*

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His Art and His Public, devoted a good deal of space to Matisse's work as a book illustrator (and the book's dust jacket was designed by Matisse, along with a lithograph that accompanied a limited edition). Barr knew the importance of the illustrated books. Later writers, perhaps a little abashed that this supremely modern painter would spend so much time delighting the bibliophiles, have unfortunately not followed Barr's lead. In Barr's classic account of the career, Matisse's illustrated books are landmarks in his journey beyond easel painting into the total environment of the Chapel at Vence and the monumentality of the later paper cutouts. The illustrated book is not a pure form, and precisely its fascination for Matisse lay in the way that the book illustrator brought together disparate kinds of experience, in this case the verbal and the visual. As an illustrator Matisse was inclined to deal with narratives and metaphors more forthrightly than he would as a painter; he did things he scarcely ever did in his painting, such as represent historical and mythological figures. As an illustrator Matisse was a traditionalist who could imagine following a text in much the way Poussin had done centuries earlier. This turned out to be a preparation for his wall-sized illustrations of the Stations of the Cross in the Chapel at Vence. Illustration signaled Matisse's break with the enclosed world of the easel painting, for once he had invented pictures that a bibliophile touched and turned he was on his way to pictures that a Dominican nun walked into and around.

Matisse's profound engagement with book illustration need not be extrapolated from the work alone. In 1946, when Albert Skira published a guide to the illustrated books of the School of Paris, Matisse contributed a text in which he outlined his own ideas about the illustrated book. He began by writing about his line etchings for Mallarmé's *Poésies*:

> The right-hand pages carrying the full-page illustrations were facing left-hand pages which carry the text in 20-point Garamond italic. The problem was then to balance the two pages—one white, with the etching, the other comparatively black, with the type.
>
> I obtained my result by modifying my arabesque in such a way that the spectator should be interested as much by the white pages as by his expectation of reading the text.
>
> I can compare my two pages to two objects taken up by a juggler. His white ball and black ball are like my two pages, the light one and the dark one; so different, yet face to face. In spite of the differences between the two objects, the art of the juggler makes a harmonious whole in the eyes of the spectator.

Later Matisse observes that "I do not distinguish between the construction of a book and that of a painting, and I always proceed from the simple to the complex, yet am always ready to reconceive in simplicity." I take this not to mean that for Matisse painting and book illustration are the same, but that he takes book illustration very seriously. Matisse is concerned that he have a "rapport with the literary character of the work," and he also writes as somebody who loves to handle books, and who conceives of all the parts as integrated, as delicately, brilliantly balanced. He observes the "rather grim character" of his linoleum cuts for Henry de Montherlant's *Pasiphaé*, and how he finally hit upon relieving the blackness of these pictures with red initials, and then of how he decided the book needed blue covers to counterbalance the red and the black.

What's fascinating (and thrilling) about Matisse's reflections on book illustration and design is to find his kind of tough formal intelligence brought to bear on a subject that is usually left to bibliographers and salespeople. Matisse's ideas about the union of image and text, which he put down on paper in the mid-1940s, echo attitudes toward design that were prevalent at the Bauhaus a generation earlier; that remark about "not distinguish[ing] between the construction of a book and that of a painting" could be lifted from a Bauhaus or Russian avant-garde manifesto. But whereas much Bauhaus and Russian avant-garde book design ultimately

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subsumed illustration within typography, Matisse really does keep the two balls, image and text, in the air at the same time. Matisse's dust jacket for Barr's book (as well as a cover design for a brochure that accompanied the 1951 MOMA exhibition and was recycled as the cover of the catalogue of Elderfield's show) might be said to begin with the premises of Constructivist book design and then reintegrate that typographic vision into a more fully expressive pictorial vision. In the books over which Matisse had complete control, the modern idea of a total artform melds with traditions that go all the way back to the illuminated manuscripts of the early Middle Ages. In the 1948 *Florilège des Amours*, which contains poetry by Ronsard, and the 1950 *Poèmes de Charles d'Orléans*, Matisse is giving us his view of Baroque and Rococo book design and illustration. These books, with their aristocratic wit and panache, are among Matisse's most undervalued achievements, divine juggling acts disguised as modest salutes to the French decorative arts. It is also interesting to note, apropos of some of the American illustrated books of a generation later, that Matisse's books, even the magisterial *Jazz*, are never daunting in size. They are designed by someone who knows that one wants to hold and read a book (even if they sometimes go a little beyond a size that would be easily manageable).

The matters that Matisse is concerned with are the same ones that all book illustrators worth their salt are concerned with. I think that the still grievously underrated Raoul Dufy sometimes comes close to Matisse in the breadth with which he conceives the role of the illustrator; he has done magnificent work in a wide range of media, including woodcut, color pochoir, etching, lithograph, and watercolors specially prepared to be photomechanically reproduced. Picasso created great pictures as illustrations—his illustrations for Ovid and Buffon define two new graphic styles—but whether they are great illustrations, with the necessary sensitivity to the relation of image and text, I am not sure. Giacometti, though his output as an illustrator is very small, demonstrates in all his book work an exemplary sensitivity to the implications of a text. Balthus, who has done hardly any book illustration, just the drawings for an abortive edition of *Wuthering Heights* and a few designs for his friend the poet Pierre Jean Jouve, has perhaps missed a great calling. I have a particular fondness for some illustrations by Gris and Maillol, but one cannot overlook Braque's decorations for his own *Cahiers*, not to mention works by Bonnard, Rouault, Chagall, Miró, and many others.

As illustrators, the School of Paris artists were incredibly prolific, and they produced masterworks in unprecedented numbers. Indeed, they produced such absolutely extraordinary things with such remarkable frequency that a casual observer can well ask why it's worth looking at anything else. The answer is that the union of image and text provides unexpected opportunities for second- and even third-string artists. As we read, we're not necessarily as visually demanding as we are when we're standing in a gallery, so that the artist whose strongest suit is charm or wit or ingenuity can achieve unexpectedly engaging results. The exhibition of twentieth-century Italian books that was at the Museum of Modern Art over the winter gave us an opportunity to think about what good book illustration looks like when it isn't swamped by great book illustration. That's not the basis for an unforgettable show, but it is the basis for an interesting show. Carlo Carrà and de Chirico may achieve greatness, but Massimo Campigli, Giacomo Manzù, and Arturo Martini are merely wonderful, with the book context providing a comfortable setting for gifts that are, to begin with, a little heavy on the literary imagination. The catalogue of the MOMA show—which expands what was seen at the museum into a comprehensive listing of over five hundred items—is an absorbing document.[2] Here we find artists who we've never even heard of achieving moments

2 *The Artist and the Book in Twentieth-Century Italy*, by Ralph Jentsch; Umberto Allemandi & C. (Turin), 341 pages, $49.50 paper.

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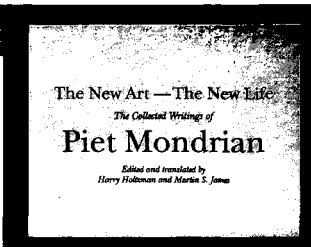
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of poetry. I will give one example, the set designer Luca Crippa's 1983 illustrations for Paul Arbelet's turn-of-the-century fantasy about Stendhal's wanderings through Milan. If this sounds like nostalgia heaped on nostalgia, that is exactly the mood spun by Crippa's etchings, at least the one reproduced in the catalogue. He frames the text with an amusing still life composed of Victorian memorabilia. It's a *little* juggling act, and image and text together have a fussily charming provincial allure.

The position of the publisher in the illustrated book business is a complicated one that is not necessarily done justice by the bibliographical entry that gives precedence to the author's or the illustrator's name. Even if we assume that Matisse controlled every aspect of his illustrated books, without impresarios such as Skira and Tériade he would scarcely have been able to get the work done. Vollard, Skira, and Tériade are to the illustrated book as Diaghilev and Kirstein are to the dance: they may not make things, but they do imagine things. (Vollard said, "I am the architect of my books.") Diaghilev's influence transcends that of a producer, just as Iliazd, the publisher whose artists' books were the subject of a show at the Modern in the summer of 1987, was more than a publisher. Iliazd was born in Russia in 1894, and the books that he produced in Paris between 1940 and 1974 have a special eccentric look that reflects his early years as a poet involved in the typographical experiments of the Russian Futurists. Iliazd's books are all exceedingly idiosyncratic as to format and design, and one gets the sense that how the books look has more to do with his taste than with that of such collaborators as Picasso and Miró. One 1949 production of his, *Poésie de mots inconnus*, was included in the La Boetie show. Here, Iliazd enlisted artists including Matisse, Giacometti, Miró, Picasso, and Masson in a commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the birth of Dada. I have never held one of Iliazd's books in my hands, so I am not in a position to appreciate the sensitivity to paper and presentation that led

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him for one 1958 book to obtain "the most beautiful japan paper one could find in Paris, that which the publisher Pelletan acquired in 1906 from Bing, exporter of items from China and Japan." But at the show of Iliazd's books, I felt that the publisher was pushing himself too much to the fore, and that the art of the book was getting lost in the art of the antibook, which was perhaps what Iliazd had in mind.

A publisher with a less intrusive sensibility was the subject of "Message from the Interior: The Eakins Press Foundation," mounted at the Zabriskie Gallery in December and January. Leslie Katz, who founded the Eakins Press in 1966 and is still in charge, is not a publisher of artists' books in any ordinary sense. He does not commission painters and sculptors to produce prints to be used as illustrations, but he has taken a number of interests—in sculpture, in photography, in book design, in the history of American art—and allowed them to flow into publications (currently forty-six) that are among the most beautiful books and portfolios ever produced in America. Katz's principal interest, formally speaking, may be in how three-dimensional experience can be preserved on the page of a book. The first publication of the press, which gave the Zabriskie show its title, was a portfolio of gravures after Walker Evans photographs of unpeopled interiors. The *Message from the Interior* was that there was poetry in everyday America, a theme pursued in a famous later Eakins Press publication, Lee Friedlander's *The American Monument*, an encyclopedic survey of public sculpture from coast to coast. The printing plates for the Friedlander book were prepared with the assistance of Richard Benson, who has been involved, both as photographer and master of the gravure technique, in a number of Eakins publications. The Eakins Press sensibility is a little dry and severe, classical in an old-fashioned American way, and appreciative of any kind of beauty that manages to flourish on native ground. American sculptors, among them Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Gaston Lachaise, Elie Nadelman, and Mary Frank, are well represented in the Eakins list. Beautifully reproduced photographs of beautiful sculpture are a Leslie Katz specialty, and a key achievement of the press is Lincoln Kirstein's 1973 monograph on Nadelman, a sepia-toned masterpiece produced in an audience-friendly first edition of three thousand copies. Like a good American, Leslie Katz is only an elitist when circumstances make it a necessity. His album of Carl Van Vechten portraits of *Harlem Heroes*, with gravure plates prepared by Benson, is in an edition of one hundred sets. The little postcard-sized pocket albums that the press brought out in the 1970s present good reproductions of historic photographs of New York City, Washington, D.C., Yosemite, and President Lincoln, and can still be had for a few dollars a pop.

By the time that we're old enough to read we understandably regard illustrated books as luxuries, but the right artist can turn a luxury commodity into an emotional necessity. At the Grolier Club show, Joan Mitchell's illustrations and Nathan Kernan's poems made a good marriage, with the colors of one Mitchell lithograph echoing the deep blue sky and orange and purple clouds of Kernan's "Mornings on the Bridge." The Mitchell book, published by Tyler Graphics, was well displayed, but looking at illustrated books in museums and galleries can be a frustrating experience. They're locked up in cases and you can't get at them. The curators of a number of the shows this season attempted to deal with the problem. At the Whitney show of children's books and the Zabriskie show of the Eakins Press a few books were placed out in the open, so that visitors could turn the pages. At La Boetie visitors were informed that they could ask permission to take a closer look.

The last book on the checklist of the Grolier Club show is *The Way Home*, a collaboration of painter Trevor Winkfield and novelist Harry Mathews, published by the Grenfell Press in 1988. This is one instance when the display ruins a visitor's fun, since from the looks of the cover, which is all one

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can see in the exhibition case, the book is nothing much. But, you can't tell a book by . . . In fact, if one holds *The Way Home* and turns the pages, it turns out to be an engaging toy of a book, with the novelist spinning a tale around a few of the painter's insistently esoteric juxtapositions of man, woman, and still-life object. Winkfield, whose dryness as a painter is just rescued by the immanence of his paint surfaces, is perhaps not perfectly served by the letterpress reproductions of his drawings in this book; I'd like to see him illustrate a book with original lithographs or etchings, where there would be more of a struggle involved in achieving his spookily personal brand of impersonality. But this book has its winning paragraphs and pictures, especially at the beginning, when Mathews's vision of imagination moving "by angles, along a black line inscribed on a white ground that is itself bordered by blackness," is a lovely accompaniment to the drawings. Toward the middle, image and text lose track of each other (and just generally lose it), and toward the close there's an altogether satisfying return to coherent incoherence. I'd say that this edition of ninety copies, priced at around a hundred and fifty dollars, is a good buy. (The copy at the Grolier Club, one of fifteen with a special cover and a color silkscreen print, cost considerably more.) But a hundred and fifty dollars is still not peanuts, and if Winkfield's illustrations intrigue, one can turn to the Toothpaste Press, which has a Winkfield collaboration with the poet Ron Padgett, *How to Be a Woodpecker*, available in a signed and numbered edition of six hundred copies for around ten dollars. Illustrated books come in all prices, and the connoisseur can be as delighted by the crude woodcut in the chapbook as by the elegantly engraved folio. At La Boetie the transcendent *Florilège des Amours* was priced at sixteen thousand dollars, but there was also *Midis gagnés*, a 1939 book of poems by Tristan Tzara with six reproductions of drawings by Matisse, that was listed at forty dollars. Think of it as the book collector's version of a seat with limited visibility at the ballet.

Exhibition notes

"Picasso and the Age of Iron," at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. March 19—May 16, 1993

This exhibition attempts to survey, in a new way, the great period of sculptural experimentation and innovation between 1925 and 1950, when constructed sculpture was invented and secured its position as a mainstream modernist style. To this end, Carmen Giménez, a curator of twentieth-century art at the Guggenheim, has marshaled an eclectic and ultimately curious mixture of sculptors: Picasso, Julio González, and David Smith—so far so good—as well as Alexander Calder and Alberto Giacometti. This last artist is so misplaced as to seem the guest who has arrived for the wrong party.

Giménez's argument against taking a more conventional approach—a straightforward look at Picasso's, González's, and Smith's work—is that it would have been too "academic" and led to "oversimplifications." Yet everything about her show's conception is so awkward as to suggest that the real explanation for its being a hodgepodge was her fear that a more "conventional" exhibition wouldn't be sexy enough to get approval, much less funding. To be able to show work she wanted to show, she had to come up with something "ground-breaking," not to mention "big box-office."

The great but rather obscured strength of this show is its juxtaposition of Picasso, González, and Smith, particularly as regards their respective approaches to the human figure. Such a concept may sound rather ho-hum or over-familiar to the powers that make exhibitions happen, but it isn't familiarity that breeds the public's contempt, it's inferior art. Sculpture as sophisticated and complex as this continues to throw out new ideas and revelations. It shouldn't be sidelined (González hasn't been shown in depth for over a decade) just because the museums think that the public already knows everything about it, or, even worse, out of a fear that no one will pay money to see it. And it

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shouldn't be apologized for by the museums that exhibit it, which is what the Guggenheim, by refusing to deal with Picasso, González, Smith, and constructed iron sculpture in a straightforward way, is doing here.

The show was also marred by various omissions and curious inclusions. It was like a jigsaw puzzle with some of its pieces missing, and others added from another puzzle to compensate. Giacometti didn't belong in this show because even though he used welded iron for his "cages," the point of this new material artistically is the new syntax it brought to sculpture, and Giacometti's cages are about something else entirely. On the other hand, Giacometti might have been a convincing presence had his *Palace at 4 A.M.* been available from MOMA. You can't really understand what David Smith was up to in the formative years of his career—generally well represented here—without it, since so many of his important pieces, notably *Home of the Welder*, were influenced by it. They grow out of it and modify it, expressing its fragile core of mystery in a far more personal and robust idiom.

Giacometti's *Palace* is like a soap bubble. Beguiling as it is, you somehow don't want to get too close to it lest you shatter its spell. *Home of the Welder* and other similar works of Smith's don't come across as being fragile at all. It's not that they're less hauntingly evocative, it's simply that they're more aggressively physical and present.

That's another price for not having *Palace* in the show. Besides depriving us of a crucial source for Smith's ideas, it withholds a yardstick, something against which to measure Smith's inventiveness and thus his greatness as a sculptor. It's commonplace nowadays for exhibition organizers to resign themselves to omissions like this with the words, "There's no such thing as a perfect exhibition," citing problems of insurance, fragility, and owner skittishness. True enough. But the other side of that coin is that if too many works are left out, or if one or two crucial ones don't make it in, you have a seriously hobbled exhibition. This is what has happened here.

There is also the problem of Calder. The enduring question with Alexander Calder has always been: Was this man a real sculptor or just a sophisticated toymaker? Stylistically, Calder is a bridge between the oneiric biomorphism of the Surrealists and the spatially restless, tectonic capabilities of the Constructivists. Aside from the crowd-pleasing playfulness of his mobiles, it may be this, his historical position, that explains why Calder has remained a persistent presence in collections, exhibitions, and books while weightier talents (such as González) have had a harder time of it. None of the numerous exhibitions of Calder's work that have been mounted in recent years has provided a reliable gauge of his achievment as a sculptor. But by placing him among his peers—other sculptors—"Picasso and the Age of Iron" does that job, although at considerable cost to Calder himself. There isn't a single work of Calder's in this show that compares with anything by the other artists. Most devastating is the revelation that when Picasso, González, and Smith pare their forms down to nothing they still achieve a largeness of statement comparable to their more ample works. With Calder, however, insubstantial form reflects insubstantial mind. What comes out of "Picasso and the Age of Iron" is that, ultimately, Calder's sculptures are extremely entertaining and decorative demonstrations of basic engineering concepts—tension, balance, counterweights, cantilevering—but are negligible as works of art. He is entirely incidental to the tradition of constructed sculpture celebrated in this show.

A catalogue, edited by Carmen Giménez, with essays by Dore Ashton and Francisco Calvo Serraller, has been published by the Guggenheim Museum/Rizzoli (331 pages, $59.95; $34.95 paper).

—Eric Gibson

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Theater

Shelley, Shaw & Broadway

by Donald Lyons

Shelley's 1819 verse tragedy *The Cenci* is a story of incest and patricide set in the Papal Rome of 1599, a story that he claims to have found in "a manuscript communicated to me during my travels in Italy." Its real origin lies rather in Shelley's reading of the Jacobean melodrama of Webster, Tourneur, and Ford. Wicked Count Cenci is a thorough scoundrel who rejoices in the sufferings of his enemies: "I love the sight of agony. . . . I am what theologians call hardened . . . till I killed a foe,/ And heard his groans, and heard his children's groans,/ I knew not what delight was else on earth." As the play opens, Cenci is enjoying the unexpected news of the deaths of two of his sons and planning the rape of his daughter, Beatrice.

After this dread event, which is never actually named but rather alluded to in dark periphrasis, occurs, Beatrice cries, "My God!/ The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood!/ The sunshine on the floor is black!" When Beatrice refuses to revisit his chamber, Cenci lets loose a curse upon her: ". . . let her food be/ Poison, until she be encrusted round/ With leprous stains! Heaven, rain upon her head/ The blistering drops of the Maremma's dew,/ Till she be speckled like a toad."

With the help of a priest swain, Beatrice plots her father's death and is herself given a death sentence by the stern and unforgiving pope, who had, for cash, forgiven her father so many and so horrid sins.

Although Shelley, in his preface, spoke of Beatrice's revenge on her father as a "pernicious" mistake, the play pretty much sees her as one who, "though wrapped in a strange cloud of crime and shame,/ Lived ever holy and unstained." There are in fact no moral complexities whatever in this gruesome melodrama of fiend and saint.

The Jean Cocteau Repertory has mounted *The Cenci* with simplicity, sobriety, and beauty. Eve Adamson's one set is an empty, raked floor "the color of dried blood"; it is decorated only by a fallen column and dominated by a gigantic door of stained bronze. The formal costumes and formalized groupings—women in high-cinched gray and ochre, men in political brown or ecclesiastical red—have a painterly feel clearly inspired by the Guido Reni portrait of Beatrice Cenci. The lighting, either ominously clear or pale and milky, eschews melodrama until the end, when the martyred Beatrice gets a glamorizing downstage spotlight. Cocteau veteran Craig Smith as Cenci manages to lace the satanic fulminations with a dry intelligence. And his task is a hard one, for Shelley never risks—perhaps was not up to—the macabre humor of the real Jacobeans. Similarly, Angela Vitale must, as Beatrice, avoid a monotonous virtue—a feat she mainly accomplishes through an icy force of character. The other performers, while adequate, do not manage to emerge distinctively from the homogenizing Shelleyan rhetoric.

Except for "lyrical dramas" like *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas* and for the Aristophanic

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parody called *Oedipus Tyrannus, or Swellfoot the Tyrant* (probably the best and liveliest of his dramatic works because it is full of contemporary political bile), *The Cenci* is Shelley's only play. It is the only one he seriously intended for production, but the manager of the Covent Garden was scandalized by the subject matter and it never saw the light of day during his lifetime. But the Cocteau is made of sterner stuff and has given us a rare and worthwhile opportunity to experience, outside the study, this supposed exception to the dismal incapacity of the Romantic poets to write drama.

Alas, there is no reason to revise F. R. Leavis's 1936 judgment that *The Cenci* is "very bad and . . . its badness is characteristic. Shelley, as usual, is the hero—here the heroine; his relation to Beatrice is of the same order as his relation to Alastor and Prometheus, and the usual vices should not be found more acceptable because of the show of drama." Leavis proceeds to enforce his verdict by illustrating just how Shelley's language again and again consists of a sentimentalizing and sensationalizing pastiche of Shakespeare.

The sad thing about *The Cenci*'s monotonously vapid diction is that the very intelligent Shelley had seen the problem and was aware of the necessity of using in drama "the familiar language of men." But he was in thrall to Romantic decorum in his diction and to Jacobean melodrama in his dramaturgy *and* diction and dared not bring the real language of 1819 onto the stage.

When one looks at what Kleist had done in the theater in Germany before his death in 1811, the somnolence of the English stage in the Romantic period is all the more striking. But English playwriting was to slumber on for more than seventy years more.

One of the first earnests of dramatic awakening in the last years of the nineteenth century was Bernard Shaw's *Candida*, which was recently revived at the Roundabout Theatre. But the Roundabout, at which *Anna Christie* was splendidly brought back earlier in the season, has smothered poor *Candida*. The famous triangle of Socialist parson, awkward poet, and eye-opening wife needs much more electric and tense staging and playing than it gets here. First of all, the clumsily shaped amphitheatrical stage displayed a horizontal sprawl of Victorian bric-a-brac in David Jenkins's absurdly massive set. Gloria Muzio's hapless direction scattered the characters about at far-flung positions.

Worst, two-thirds of the Shavian triangle drooped. Robert Foxworth never got a handle on the Reverend James Mavor Morell, that pampered fool of a sermon-writing husband fatuously unaware of the onion-chopping, bill-paying, reality-grounded activities of the wife who sustains his high-minded egotism. Foxworth was merely dim and vague, projecting no (theatrically necessary) folly or pathos. More fatal was the lacuna in the part of Candida, which was played by wispily minimalist film actress Mary Steenburgen. Candida must be an incisively—even cruelly—realistic intelligence occasionally pretending to be an insipid flirt; Steenburgen played an insipid flirt vainly aspiring to incisive intelligence.

Weaknesses in Morell and in Candida throw the play into the lap of the puppyishly romantic Eugene Marchbanks, whose flamboyant crush on Candida is deflected only by her brutal deflation of, but continuing allegiance to, her "great baby" of a husband. (There are darknesses just below the smiling surfaces of *Candida* that are missed even by much better productions than this.) A smart comic actor can, with his genuflections and pratfalls and lovably romantic foolishness, steal *Candida* even from strong leads. Here the gifted Robert Sean Leonard has only to pocket the evening in plain sight. Also excellent—in fact, she is the most vivid woman on stage—is Ann Dowd as the Reverend Morell's tart-tongued but secretly smitten typist, Miss Proserpine Garnett, for once played not as a Margaret Rutherford type but as a handsome young woman.

Wendy Wasserstein has called her new play, *The Sisters Rosensweig*, now at the Ethel Bar-

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rymore, "part commercial boulevard comedy and part that's sort of serious, with almost Chekhovian parts to it in a way." About the commercial boulevard comedy part she'll get no quarrel from me. John Lee Beatty's set is a glorified London "sitting room in Queen Anne's Gate"—one of those airy, comfy, warmly lit fantasies that exist primarily in upmarket plays and films. It's the house of expatriate Sara Rosensweig Goode, "the first woman to run a Hong Kong bank" and an overall brilliant career woman whose heart has somehow become hardened along the road to worldly success. We are in Rosalind Russell or Katharine Hepburn country here. Jane Alexander plays Sara in a vein of grim prose, which makes one yearn for the manic poetry of yesterday's career women. Sara is fifty-four today and is being visited (Wasserstein's dramaturgy creaks a good deal) by her two sisters, each more eccentrically successful than the other. Pfeni Rosensweig is a brilliant travel writer just in from Bombay and much exercised about the plight of the Kurdish refugees and the sufferings of Afghan women; Gorgeous Rosensweig Teitelbaum is the wife of a rich Newton, Massachusetts, lawyer and has recently found unexpected celebrity and success as "Doctor Gorgeous," the star of a radio advice program. Pfeni, as played by Christine Estabrook and as written by Wasserstein, amounts to a Bohemian variant of Sara, while Gorgeous is the comic foil, reveling in the reactionary, and audience-delighting, banalities of tourism, shopping, clothes, and make-up. Gorgeous is a part that might in earlier days have been played by, say, Shirley Booth or Eileen Heckart and that has been robbed of almost all surprise by a million TV sitcoms. There is very little life left in this gaudy and sentimental stereotype, despite Madeline Kahn's desperate and at times almost demented efforts to wring its neck.

The sisters Rosensweig reminisce a good deal about their childhood and specially about their cultured mother. Sara, who once dreamed of becoming a singer, takes us back to the songs of her youth when she was in a Radcliffe singing group. Sara seems to regret having left America and having left Judaism, but nothing much comes of these transient emotions. (In one of the play's few fresh touches, it is the otherwise vapid Gorgeous who keeps up the family's religious traditions, insisting on lighting Sabbath candles in Sara's fancy sitting room.) The three sisters, joined from time to time by Sara's activist, PC daughter—a dim cliché—sit around looking back, but in fact very little in their lives as spread before us here offers material for ruefulness or regret. Wasserstein wants to have it both ways: her feminism insists that these lives be endorsed, while her Chekhovian pretensions demand that something be found vaguely missing in them.

The play does have its men. Sara's Spencer Tracy, an ordinary, grounded joe to bring her down off her inhumanly lofty career perch for a frank roll in the hay, is Mervyn, a fake-fur furrier traveling around Europe for the AJC. As played by the likably sarcastic and effortlessly menschy Robert Klein, Mervyn is the comedy's brightest note. Klein gets the show's biggest laughs scoring off the velvety nuances of anti-Semitic condescension: complimented on his colorful shirt by a Brit noble, he says, "It's a money-lending shirt"; told something is "very Brooklyn," he ripostes, "No, very the Bronx, actually." So far, so good. But, after Wasserstein sends the unlikely pair upstairs for a night together, she can come up with nothing better (or less distasteful) for the morning-after scene than to have all the characters ask them, "How was it?" This is television, not life.

The other significant male is Pfeni's on-again, off-again beau, a theater director named Geoff. Geoff has just directed a hit musical version of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*; Geoff knows the lyrics to lots of Motown tunes and likes to sing and dance to them; Geoff tells Pfeni things like, "I want us to be the Noel and Gertie of our day." Hmmm. Geoff has, apparently, a problem in fully "committing" to Pfeni. Can *you* guess what that problem is, Rainbow Curriculum Children? Yes! Geoff is bisexual and soon ditches Pfeni, declaring, "I miss men." The whole notion of Geoff is a dismal dramaturgical

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embarrassment, only going to show that such Noël Coward or, shall we say, Edward Everett Horton types are unwritable today, at least by Wendy Wasserstein, whose slim talent to amuse is vastly inferior to those of the Ben Hechts and Clare Boothes of Broadway's and Hollywood's palmier days.

As for Chekhov, Wendy Wasserstein has far too complacent a view of life and is far too unwilling to examine the reigning cultural dogmas of her day for the comparison to mean anything at all.

Another playwright ritually likened to the Russian (could a law be passed by our now ungridlocked national legislature forbidding all comparisons of anybody to Chekhov?) is Lanford Wilson, whose "idiosyncratic poetic vision," according to Frank Rich in the *Times*, "suggests Chekhov by way of Mark Twain." Actually, to me Wilson's best play, *Fifth of July*, suggests William Inge.

His new play, *Redwood Curtain*, at the Brooks Atkinson, is a three-person one-acter set largely in the redwood forest in northwestern California and in a redwood house on that forest's edge. John Lee Beatty has again imagined a plush fantasy decor, this time in dark wood, for his interior, but the exterior, the forest, seems too insistently and grandiosely symbolic by half. And Marshall W. Mason's direction, static and rigid, only accentuates the script's pompous portentousness.

We open in the forest with the collision of Geri, a seventeen-year-old Amerasian woman, and Lyman, a bearded, traumatized Nam vet who has reverted to an ursine existence in the forest. But if Lyman (played by Wilson veteran Jeff Daniels) has become subhuman, Geri is virtually superhuman. She is an animist magician able to summon wind and storm; she is a phenomenally gifted pianist just returned from a triumphant tour of Japan; she is an orphan abandoned by both her Vietnamese mother and her GI father in the last days of Saigon and in desperate search of both. Thinking that Lyman might be her father, she tries to interrogate the uncommunicative and fearful man, but Geri is more interested in philosophizing on her own. "I come from a magical culture," she says, contrasting her richly numinous background with the American culture that has produced mainly the MIA-rescuing, comic-book figure of Rambo, whom she has to explain to Lyman, as there are no VCRs in the trees. "Rambo makes you wonder about all the wonderful wars we won," she announces. Wilson seems to be hinting that we did not win—or perhaps did not deserve to win—World War II or the Civil War. It is a dogma of the mindset that writes such plays that America's experience in Vietnam was not an anomaly but a window into its evil soul.

But soon we mercifully quit the symbolic forest for the log mansion of Geri's aunt Geneva (enjoyably played by Debra Monk). Geneva is one of those wisecracking Broadway aunts in the Mame Dennis mold so beloved of middlebrow camp. It is a familiar aspect of this permissive-parent fantasy figure that she be immensely rich yet untainted by the political incorrectness of money as such. Here, Geneva is the wife of a doltish tycoon (unseen) who has just sold the neighboring redwoods—beloved of Geneva—for sixty million dollars to some kind of evil developers who will tear them down. (*Redwood Curtain* was first produced in January 1992 in Seattle, where this oversimplified scenario no doubt pleased some.) This sleight-of-hand leaves the acerbic, martini-quaffing aunt free to be fabulously wealthy and to be contemptuous of the very sources of her fabulousness.

The play ends with the aunt and the vet listening in meditative, bemused attitudes as the young pianist fingers a sad Satie "Gymnopédie" on the ivories. It is a tableau typical of a playwright who does not quite know what he wants to say but wants to seem to be saying something profound.

There seems nothing Chekhovian, even in intention, about this watery ratatouille of diced symbols. The model is rather, perhaps, Ibsen, but this is *Peer Gynt* by way of Noam Chomsky and *Auntie Mame*.

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Music

The strange case of Charles Valentin Alkan

by James F. Penrose

The actual stuff and substance of his music . . . is of such startling oddity, such intensely personal and individual quality, shot through with an eerie, uncanny feeling that makes it of irresistible fascination.

—Kaikhosru Sorabji, *Mi Contra Fa*

For someone thought by Liszt to possess the greatest piano technique of the age and equally esteemed by Busoni as one of the great composers for the piano after Beethoven, Charles Valentin Alkan has certainly fallen on hard times. Even before his death on Holy Thursday, 1888, Alkan had fallen into the unremitting obscurity from which he is only now beginning to emerge. History is happenstance: it can be as harsh to an Alkan as it can be kind to a Satie.

Though apparently a warm, if somewhat shy, young man, Alkan developed into a notorious misanthrope and hermit in his later years. During his periods of seclusion he wrote much of his daunting and beautiful music while slowly shedding his early friendships with Hugo, Delacroix, Sand, Dumas, Liszt, and others in that glittering circle. Late in life, Alkan emerged from his solitude to give a remarkable series of retrospective *petits-concerts* featuring works by then-disregarded composers such as Rameau, Bach, Haydn, and Mozart. At a time when the late Beethoven sonatas were relatively unpopular, Alkan played them in little-attended performances held evenings *à 9 heures très-précises* in a room at the Salle Erard featuring a grand piano and the *piano-pédalier* on which Alkan was, by all accounts, an astonishing virtuoso. The controversial circumstances of his death are probably the most remembered thing about him, and the moonstruck explanations surrounding that occasion are legendary.

A new collection of fifteen essays on Alkan, collected and edited by Brigitte François-Sappey, has lately been published in France.[1] It is an interesting and useful guide to the composer and his works, and supplements the two-volume study of Alkan by the British pianist and Alkanomane Ronald Smith (London, 1976 and 1987). Madame François-Sappey has contributed three essays to the collection, the most important being a long study of Alkan's neglected and staggering *Grande Sonate*. Two pianists, Pierre Réach and Laurent Martin, bring a performer's perspective to the collection. There are analyses of Alkan's chamber music and organ and *pédalier* works. The book also includes pieces on Alkan's religiousness and his fascination with unusual titles. Hugh MacDonald, whose lively and informed pieces have done much to rekindle interest in Alkan, has contributed an informative piece on Alkan's compositional style.

Valentin Alkan was born in 1813 (the same year as Wagner and Verdi) in the rue de Braque in the Marais district of Paris, the

1 *Charles Valentin Alkan*, edited by Brigitte François-Sappey; Fayard (Paris), 336 pages, 150FF.

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second of six children. His father, Alkan Morhange, was an Ashkenazic Jew who ran a preparatory school in the rue des Blancs-Manteaux, so successful in teaching musical subjects that one writer termed it *une annexe juvenile du Conservatoire*. The Morhange children all adopted their father's first name as the family patronymic and Charles Valentin signed himself "C. V. Alkan aîné," i.e., Alkan the elder.

Alkan was a prodigy. At six, he was accepted by the Paris Conservatoire. When eight, he won first prize in *solfège* and at ten, first prize in piano under the suave and ultranationalistic P. J. G. Zimmermann (who later refused to meet the young American prodigy Louis Moreau Gottschalk on the entirely reasonable grounds that *l'Amérique n'etait qu'un pays de machines à vapeur*).[2] At thirteen, Alkan took first prize in harmony and at twenty he finished things off with a first in organ. Alkan was *répétiteur* in *solfège* at the Conservatoire from 1829 to 1836, where he taught Nadia Boulanger's father. (Insofar as the expression "Every little town in America has a Woolworth's and a pupil of Nadia Boulanger" contains a grain of truth, Alkan may have had some small influence on posterity.) His elder sister, Céleste, was admitted to the Conservatoire when she was seven and won the *solfège* prize at eleven. His brothers were equally talented, three of them taking eight Conservatoire "firsts" and a second place in the Prix de Rome. Two brothers (and Alkan's illegitimate son) finished their careers as professors at the Conservatoire, then, as now, a pinnacle of French musical life.

Zimmermann was more than just Alkan's teacher. He promoted the young man's career by appointing him his assistant. Zimmermann also used his extensive social connections to introduce young Valentin to those soirees where musical reputations were hatched. Alkan seems to have taken to this hothouse world of high society and high culture. He cultivated (and dedicated several works to) *des dames très parfumées et froufroutantes* and moved into the fashionable Square d'Orléans near Zimmermann, Friedrich W. M. Kalkbrenner, and his new friend Frédéric Chopin. Chopin (who rarely enthused about anyone) was much taken by Alkan's pianism and compositions. Moreover, the two found each other convivial company and occasionally performed together. They also shared piano students from the pampered classes, which arrangement would certainly have benefited Alkan, as lessons with Chopin were exceptionally expensive.

By 1838, Alkan had reached the peak of his acclaim. He also seems to have had increasing difficulty in balancing the demands of popular fame against his musical and pedagogical aspirations and against a fast-developing horror of what he considered the musically commonplace. He reacted to these pressures by dropping out of sight for some six years.

Like many artists, Alkan thrived on contradiction: though a prodigiously gifted performer, he disliked performing; well-connected socially, he was easily disappointed in friendship; though interested in socialism, he worshiped Napoleon III. His penchant for extremes was reflected in his music, which often featured odd titular pairings such as *Ma chère Liberté* and *Ma chère Servitude*, *Neige et Lave*, and *Jean qui Pleure* and *Jean qui Rit*. The effect of his artistic and emotional peculiarities on others was heightened by a morbid sensitivity coupled with a whiplash tongue. Alkan seems to have taken as his personal motto the phrase "truth lies in the extremes."

One by one, Alkan resolved these discords. The process was hastened by his failure to be appointed as Zimmermann's successor at the Conservatoire—undoubtedly because Auber, the director, had been clawed one too many times by the prickly Alkan—and by the appointment of Antoine Marmontel, a former pupil of Alkan's. The

2 "America was only a country of steam engines." Zimmermann may have been inspired by the august and treacherous Talleyrand, who professed that *L'Amérique est un pays de sales cochons et des cochons sales* ("America is a land of filthy pigs *and* filthy pigs").

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second accelerator was the death of Chopin in November 1849. Alkan went into seclusion again, this time for twenty-five years.

Almost all of Alkan's surviving works are written for the piano. The finest of these were completed during the fifteen years from 1847. During this period, Alkan published the *25 Préludes*, the *Grande Sonate*, the *Douze Etudes dans les tons majeurs* (the Major Key Etudes), the *Douze Etudes dans les tons mineurs* (the Minor Key Etudes), the *Sonatine*, and the forty-eight *Esquisses*.

Much of Alkan's writing has a melancholy or depressive component, perhaps most effectively described as "cold." It should not be concluded, however, that his music is doleful or mournful. Alkanian melancholia can be, paradoxically, very high-voltage indeed. His intense rhythmic pulse, simultaneous exploitation of the highest and lowest reaches of the keyboard, and generation of almost unbelievable sonorities leave the listener both exhilarated and appalled. At its most icy and magnificent, when the performer is almost prone with the effort of delivering himself of the extreme emotional and physical demands of the music, Alkan generates the most remarkable sensation in his listeners that they have just smelled, or, more precisely, *thought that they smelled* some deep, smoking thing. The effect of this marvelous writing arrests even a present-day listener; the sadness, the demonism, the omnipresent foreboding, the palpably sinister all gleam darkly through the rush of sound. Alkan's freshness of effect is startling: the conjurings of Weber and Liszt, once so evocative of misfortune, have been rendered in our century as trite and banal through the counterfeiting and reworking of their techniques by advertising, cartoons, and the latest world-première network movie.[3] In listening to Alkan's works, we recall an almost forgotten ability to be stirred by these dark emotions. His obsessional repetitions, the haunting melodies and distressing harmonies, the propulsive power and the almost suffocating intensity of the music deliver a formidable shock.

The *sanctum sanctorum* of Alkan's music is found in the twelve Minor Key Etudes (published in 1857) and the *Grande Sonate* (published in 1848). The technical demands of this music are so burdensome that performance is restricted to only a handful of pianists. Notwithstanding the musical literacy of the nineteenth century, one wonders how a music publisher could have ever believed that there was a popular market for works of this difficulty.

The Minor Key Etudes are divided into two books. The first book contains seven studies, including the four constituting the *Symphonie*. The second book contains the three-movement *Concerto*, the *Ouverture*, and the marvelous twelfth etude, *Le Festin d'Aesope* ("Aesop's Feast").

The first book begins with the aptly titled perpetual-motion study *Comme le Vent*. A glance at the first bar is sufficient to indicate the pianistic pain that lies ahead: the unusual 2/16 time signature (fast), the injunction *Prestissamente* (faster), the 160 metronome marking and the pair of thirty-second note triplets (fastest). When the performer realizes that the etude continues for twenty-one pages,[4] the horrified reaction is usually disguised as feigned amusement or eye-rolling scorn. The second and third studies are severe and enigmatic pieces characterized, in the first, by a characteristically quirky Alkanian rhythm and, in the second, by a menacing formality.

The jewels of the first book, however, are the four studies grouped as the *Symphonie*. At fifty pages, the work is as long as a Liszt transcription of a Beethoven symphony. To analogize the Liszt and Alkan offerings further, however, would be misleading, for al-

3 For example, two years ago an announcer on one of New York's classical radio stations identified the harrowing Liszt transcription of Schubert's *Erlkönig* not by name but (mistakenly) as "the theme song of *Rocky and Bullwinkle*."

4 By way of perspective, Liszt's finger-crushing *Etudes Transcendantes* each average about twelve pages; *Comme le Vent* is one of the shorter pieces in the set.

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though the Liszt transcriptions are masterly undertakings, Liszt himself considered that he was but "an intelligent engraver, a conscientious translator" of the works of others. Alkan's approach was quite different: the *Symphonie* was conceived and written for piano alone. Alkan hedged the limitations of the piano by his ability to evoke orchestral effects from the keyboard.

The *Symphonie* begins with the fourth etude, marked *Allegro Moderato*, featuring a brooding theme developed in his economic and formal style. The *Marche Funèbre* second movement commences with a grim rustling drumbeat that gives way to a lovely and consoling secondary theme reminiscent of the lyrical treatment in the funeral march of his friend Chopin's B-flat minor Sonata, before returning to the first figure and wandering despondently away. The third movement (the sixth etude) is a jittery *Minuet* while the *Finale* is one of Alkan's characteristic and terrifying glories, rhythmically inexorable, implacably developed, and, at its climax, maniacally ferocious.

The second book commences with the three etudes making up the *Concerto*. This gigantic work is longer than most concerti with orchestra, the first movement alone continuing for seventy-three pages. The tenth etude, marked *Allegretto alla Barbaresca*, is a thrilling and horripilating polonaise. The eleventh etude, an *Ouverture*, is the third in the series of quasi-orchestral forms, but is scarcely the curtain-raising crowd-pleaser normally associated with the genre. This intense and inward-looking study hurls the listener *in medias res* with a theme introduced by rapidly repeated chords. The set concludes with *Le Festin d'Aesope*, perhaps the best known study of the twelve. In theme-and-variation form, the piece showcases Alkan's uncanny ability to musically describe the extra-musical: a menagerie of dogs, fish, fleas, and birds. It also serves, as Mme François-Sappey notes, as a summary compendium of the pianistic techniques of the preceding eleven studies.

The *Grande Sonate* was written when Alkan was only thirty-three and shows him to be then possessed of both a fabulous technique and an incomparable sense of personal isolation. Subtitled *Les Quatre Ages*, each of the four movements (titled "20 years", "30 years: *Quasi-Faust*", "40 years: *Un heureux ménage*," and "50 years: *Prométhée enchaîné*") is a psychological evocation of a period of creative life.

The structure of the *Grande Sonate* is most unusual, progressing from a brisk *Scherzo* first movement to an *Assez vite* second movement, to a slow third movement in G major and thence to a last movement, marked *Extrêmement lent*, in G-sharp minor; the effect of these progressively slower and cooler movements is one of increasing gravity and burden. The *Scherzo* is disarmingly precocious, rocketing through many key changes before focusing on D-sharp minor, the cool and remote key of the *Quasi-Faust* second movement. *Quasi-Faust* is one of the most remarkable pieces of music—let alone piano music—of the nineteenth century, with its closely fought struggle between Hell and redemption culminating in an eight-part (not including doublings) fugue, the argument of which is at once cold and deeply exciting. The third movement, with its shy, song-like passages, is something of a balm to the listener still in an uproar from the previous movement. The temperature of the *Grande Sonate* takes a sharp dive in a last movement of unremitting bleakness, emotionally similar to the last movement of the Chopin *Funeral March* sonata except for a final, terminally defiant chord.

The unity of the *Grande Sonate* is reminiscent of the Schubert *Wanderer Fantasy* and predictive of the Liszt B minor *Sonata*, which are its chief competitors in the category of most-original-work-of-the-age. Mme François-Sappey's long analysis of the piece is a valuable work, despite a perplexing discussion of the numerology behind the opus number of the piece (33), the age of the composer when he wrote it (33), the age of the composer when the piece was published (34), and the age of the composer's father when his elder son was born (34).

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Little is known about Alkan's reclusive years when he kept only the most tenuous links with the outside world. We do know, however, that during this time Alkan mastered the *pédalier*, that curious and defunct child of the piano and organ and a plausible (if typically aberrant) choice of instrument for one who took first prize at the Conservatoire in those more conventional instruments. Alkan played an Erard *pédalier*, a full grand piano whose bass strings were connected to a thirty-note pedalboard. It was, perhaps, for this reason that Alkan kept two apartments, one on top of the other, as a means of containing the hellish din which was undoubtedly produced when the old man was in full cry.

Alkan also composed for the *pédalier*, writing a series of thirteen *Prières*, an Impromptu on *A Mighty Fortress*, and several other works that range from the religious and muted to the incendiary. Two peculiar works were a set of etudes for feet alone and a remarkably odd duet for four feet, the *Bombardo-Carillon*. When the pianist Rudolph Ganz was asked to play the *Bombardo-Carillon* with a female pupil of his, he demurred on the grounds that he did not know the young lady well enough.

Except for the occasional spark of interest in his music, Alkan's sad posterity has been the legend of his death. Joining such illustrious company as Koczwara (autoerotic asphyxia) and Lully (stabbed himself with his baton while conducting), Alkan was reputed to have died by being crushed under his bookcase. Such a lurid demise was obviously ripe for embroidery, and embroidered it was: we learn, for example, that the book Alkan sought was a volume of the Talmud. Along with earlier work by Hugh MacDonald showing the vast implausibility of this scenario, Constance Himmelfarb has unearthed evidence suggesting that in fact Alkan had been ill for some period and that death resulted from an accretion of problems over time rather than from the conventionally grotesque version.

Alkan's most salient trait was his distinctive musical language. Though born in the nineteenth century, his output was not dictated by the conventions of the time: he was deeply comfortable with classical form yet within those constraints he created most unusual works. Though a man who lived much of his life within the disciplines of the past, his idiosyncratic style anticipated twentieth-century composers such as Bartók, Cowell, Mahler, and Messiaen. Alkan's astonishingly innovative use of traditional musical language may well yet vindicate Busoni's judgment of this often great (but always greatly misunderstood) figure. But we shouldn't hold our collective breath. For many years, the BBC celebrated April Fools' Day with a series of fabricated news stories. One year, the evening news featured a piece about a typical Italian spaghetti farm where happy rustics harvested spaghetti from bushes. A subsequent episode dealt with the impending conversion of Big Ben into a giant digital clock, beeping and blinking the time every quarter hour.

On another occasion, the BBC featured a story about a reclusive French composer who concocted unplayable works for a bizarre instrument that combined an organ pedalboard with a grand piano, who in his younger days was a piano virtuoso of almost superhuman ability, and who died by being crushed by his bookcase when he attempted to remove a book from the top shelf. Chuckling with delight that it had not been tricked again, the public lumped one of the great post-Beethoven composers with spaghetti bushes and other April Fools' Day antics. It seems both unfair and yet somehow appropriate that Alkan should have been buried on April 1, 1888 (coincidentally, Easter Sunday), in Montmartre Cemetery.

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The media

Pursuits of happiness

by James Bowman

It has been interesting and to me gratifying if unexpected to see the negative reactions in the media to a little—really a very little—typical Hollywood politicking at the Oscar ceremony this year. The producer of the show, Gil Cates, said that he would not have Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins, who appealed on behalf of Haitian AIDS victims, or Richard Gere, whose concern was for Tibetans, on his show or in his home again. Well done, Gil! (Though can we believe that anyone in Hollywood could be *really* that "judgmental"?) Almost as remarkable were cartoons by the likes of Doug Marlette, who draws for New York *Newsday*, and Jeff Darcy of *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

Marlette's showed two toothy presenters at a future ceremony saying: "For silliest appeal on behalf of an obscure political cause in a futile attempt to prove actors are not frivolous, self-absorbed, pea-brains, but actually serious, substantive human beings the nominees are . . ." Darcy's cartoon depicted a typical working man in overalls saying: "The cotton ear plug on my lapel represents millions of suffering Americans who don't want to hear actor types airing their political views during the Oscars."

It is the latter cartoon, actually, which gives me greater hope. Maybe even the ridiculous AIDS ribbons that have been all but *de rigueur* for a couple of years now at gatherings like the Oscar ceremonies are beginning to show up as the appalling humbug that they are. This is the more likely now that it has become possible for the beautiful people to color-code their compassion, wearing a red ribbon for AIDS, a pink ribbon for breast-cancer awareness, a purple ribbon (sported on Oscar night by Denzel Washington) for sympathy with the victims of urban violence, a green ribbon for the tree huggers, a black ribbon for opposition to the death penalty, or a rainbow-colored ribbon for those hopeful of avoiding more riots in Los Angeles. Perhaps instead there will be street clashes between the breast-cancer gang and the death-penalty gang.

"Decorations will be worn" is a phrase still occasionally to be seen on formal invitations to gatherings which include military officers. But such decorations have been earned: society requires the naturally modest to reveal what (so the convention suggests) they would otherwise hide. The decorations which are now being worn as a means of proclaiming one's sensitivity rather than one's bravery can be taken up by anyone for the price of six inches of ribbon; they are the individual's imposition upon society rather than the reverse. Likewise, sensitivity, unlike bravery, is among the cheapest of virtues—if it is a virtue at all when carried to the lengths that are typical of so many areas of public discourse these days.

For the habit of wearing one's heart upon one's sleeve—or upon one's lapel—is what has led to such egregious misuses of the public airwaves as are to be seen on afternoon television shows—or read about in

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newspaper accounts of the Woody Allen-Mia Farrow custody hearings. Mr. Allen and Miss Farrow (who, one waggish reporter wrote, "used to be thought of as 'private' people") are certainly guilty of washing their dirty linen in public, but that is something that is to some extent not in their control. The more serious breach of taste on their part took place long ago and is what is ultimately responsible for their present predicament. It was to adopt as their own the belief that life is a pursuit of happiness.

One of the consequences of the breakdown of the American educational system is that so few of the few who ever learn about the Declaration of Independence at all learn that "happiness" in Jefferson's formulation does not mean what "happiness" does in Woody Allen's. One's "hap" used to be one's fortune, as we realize from that meaning's survival in "mishap." Happiness, therefore, to a Virginia farmer of the eighteenth century would have meant good fortune but would have implied nothing about feelings beyond the elementary sense of gratification that must be inferred in those whom good luck befalls.

Jefferson was being revolutionary enough, God knows. His Declaration was as much of the Independence of the individual as it was of the thirteen colonies—independence from the web of social obligation which has in all ages and times restricted that pursuit of individual good fortune which he so startlingly endowed his fellow countrymen with as a natural and political right. He may even have made Woody Allen inevitable, once the inexorable process of internalization had had two centuries to work on his newly autonomous individual. But he was not promising us a right to feel good in his new American republic, and those who suppose that he was are people who are not only going to make themselves miserable, like Woody Allen and Mia Farrow, but who are all too likely to make the rest of us miserable as well.

That, as it happens, was a point raised in a long editorial entitled "No Guardrails" that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* on March 18. The *Journal* was so proud of this that it took out a full-page ad in *The New York Times* in order to reprint it and invite comment. Rush Limbaugh, the conservative radio talk-show host who doesn't allow reading on his program, read out the whole thing. Its thesis was that the language of personal autonomy without regard to traditional social sanctions (those "guardrails") has obtained a kind of cultural hegemony in America ever since the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968.

From that point on, says the *Journal*, there was never any shortage of pundits and professors ready to apologize for anti-social behavior on the grounds that its perpetrators were motivated by sincere feelings that they were in the right. They were, in a fashion, exercising their rights as Americans to pursue happiness. This is bad enough for the rest of us who happen to find ourselves in a position to obstruct that pursuit, but it is even worse for the weaker vessels in society who, told by Nike to "Just Do It," go out and get pregnant or do drugs or crack up. *The New Yorker*, even in saying that no liberals had risen to the *Journal*'s bait, rose to the bait itself to proclaim that the Sixties were long dead, that Jerry Rubin was selling patent medicines, and that, therefore, "the cultural elite" was off the hook.

Here, I'm afraid, I have to agree with *The New Yorker*'s conclusion, if not its premises. The occasion of the *Journal*'s piece was the murder of an abortionist in Pensacola, Florida, by a fanatical right-to-lifer. No doubt for good tactical reasons *The New Yorker*'s editorialist suggested that the social wreckage of the last twenty-five years could be laid as much at the door of right-wing religious fanatics as at that of the secular clerisy to which *The Wall Street Journal* addresses itself. But this is not true, nor does it serve the noble cause of bashing the cultural elite to add to the catalogue of its sins the murder of Dr. Gunn. This you can only do, paradoxically, by arguing that his killer, Mr. Michael Griffin, was provoked beyond all power of resistance by all that permissiveness. Where are the pundits and the professors who are apologizing for Griffin? They are not in evi-

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dence. On the contrary, the Left has seized upon his deed as an excuse for silencing or rendering impotent anti-abortion protests while the Right, like the *Journal*, falls all over itself in its haste to dissociate itself from him.

If the spirit of the Sixties is to be blamed, let it be blamed for what it is truly guilty of. Anyone with a memory of the Sixties can name half a dozen major race riots that took place before the riot at the Chicago convention. And after every one of them there were culturally prominent voices raised (as they were raised again after the Los Angeles riots last spring) to tell us that we had to understand "black rage"—never mind that black rage's most devastating effect was upon black lives and black property. The *Journal*'s editorialist never mentions race but instead finds a non-racial riot, the like of which had not been seen before and has not been seen since, to stand as the only begetter of a social phenomenon whose most insidious effect, as he recognizes, is felt not in riots at all but in breakdown at the level of the individual or the family.

Why is this? For two reasons. One is that race is still a terrible taboo for rich white people of any political coloring. So great is the burden of our privilege upon our weary shoulders that perhaps its weight is being felt now even by Limbaugh. After the Los Angeles riots he offered a special welcome to new listeners to his show who were tuning in on the radios they had looted. I wonder if he would do that now that he is on familiar terms with former-President Bush, now that his best-selling book and his television show have made him considerably richer and more successful than he was only a year ago, now that *Time* and *The New York Times* are interviewing him and so giving him some of the cachet of respectability he used to lack. It seems to me that he is less fun than he used to be and that his hobnobbing with the likes of George Will and William Bennett has made him sound more like them and less like himself—full of high sentence, no doubt, but not so full of laughs.

The mention of Bennett brings up the second reason for the Chicago convention paradigm: it allows us the precious illusion that we understand this social breakdown. If we know *where* it started then it must be possible to know *why* it started. And if we know why then presumably our social engineers can turn it around. Statistics create the same illusion, and only three days before "No Guardrails" the *Journal*'s editorial page extended its hospitality to Bennett to explain his Index of Leading Cultural Indicators—eight statistical measures of quality of life ranging from SAT scores to average daily time watching television to the violent-crime rate. All of them, not surprisingly, show that there are fewer of the good numbers and more of the bad numbers since the days of Good King Ike in 1960.

But even apart from my doubts about the arbitrary and politically tendentious character of these measures, I have the feeling that we need them only because we dare not look at how deeply rooted is the anomie of which they are only a tiny few of the manifestations. Looking not only at how many hours we spend watching television but also at what is being watched during those hours suggests less a political program than alternative methods of suicide. I'm all for mindless entertainment, mind you, but I am more than a little alarmed that some of the forms of mindlessness now to be found on the box are thought by anybody to be entertaining.

The best recent example I can think of is *Diana: Her True Story*, the two-part adaptation of Andrew Morton's book about the Princess of Wales which ran on NBC early in April. Like Woody and Mia, Charles and Di suffer the appalling indignity of seeing their breakup in all its messy detail splashed in the media. Woody and Mia brought it on themselves, so one feels less guilty in the role of voyeur. In the case of the Windsors, it is unclear how far the prince and princess connived with the press to embarrass each other, though it is safe to say that Diana was more responsible for making the whole thing public. She was also quite clearly, for all her English pedigree, much more the American-style happiness-pursuer of the two.

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For these reasons, and out of natural perversity, I was determined to root for Charles in this very Dianacentric representation of their conflict. Above all, I recoiled from the show's invitation to pity him because he never learned to express his feelings or had an exaggerated sense of public duty's prior claims over private indulgence. And of course Diana's claptrap about her "needs" and her "compassion" and her attempts to break free from the constraints imposed by duty (talk about no guardrails!) is just unspeakable. Do you suppose that the real Diana, however awful she may be, could be anywhere near as awful as this?

Nevertheless, I could see that such a character as Prince Charles was doomed from the moment he was deposited in the box. It is *television* and not just Oprah or Phil or Geraldo which demands intimacy. And television is merciless with those who do not provide it. A little six-inch-high manikin captured in a fishbowl in our family room cannot stand on his dignity. If he does he looks as ridiculous as Gulliver among the Brobdingnagians. Since so much of celebrity, our new-fangled substitute for fame, depends on coming across well on television, those who suffer from the desire for it—the first infirmity of mediocre minds—must make a Faustian bargain to barter whatever reserve and self-restraint modesty has endowed them with in order to get it.

Someone like Prince Charles, who has made no such deal but is condemned in any case to see his strangulated manner of speaking expertly mimicked by David Threlfall solely in order to make him look silly, is particularly unfortunate. It is not too much to say that if the monarchy falls, television will be seen to have pushed it. When Walter Bagehot said that it is not good to let too much light in upon the mystery of majesty, he had no idea of the candle power of the cathode-ray tube. To see those who aspire to reign as king and queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland talking in anguished tones of personal happiness and fulfillment in the language of the therapeutic culture is to see

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monarchy shorn of the last vestige of its plausible claim to exist. You might as well have Woody and Mia—or Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon—as your king and queen.

The only reason for voluntarily watching such a sad spectacle as *Diana: Her True Story* (as indeed for watching so much of television) is *Schadenfreude*—a fierce, vengeful satisfaction that nothing remains which has not been brought down to the most basic and base human level of "shared feelings," that there is no one left who is not as busily pursuing happiness as we ourselves. Certainly reverence and awe have little chance of survival in this medium—which is why it can tolerate religion in the form of folksy preaching but not heavy liturgy. Even the incomparable mystery and magic of *Parsifal*, the Metropolitan Opera production of which was broadcast by PBS for Easter, came across looking more like a Saturday-morning cartoon than the eternal cosmic drama of sin and redemption.

This was nobody's fault (TV's eternal plaint!). Sin doesn't play on television and therefore neither does redemption. The orchestra, conducted by James Levine, and the singers, headed by Siegfried Jerusalem in the title role, did a swell job and the sets no doubt looked impressive and majestic on the Metropolitan stage. But the larger-than-life could not survive domestication and transformation into the smaller-than-life. I found myself making a list of the ways in which this opera could be considered inappropriate to the televisual ethos: for example, besides its belief in sin, there is its length, its vastness of scope, its assumption of historical knowledge, its obsession with "purity" and celibacy, its unironic portrayal of heroism, its separation of magic from either fantasy or trickery, and its reliance on male/female stereotyping.

In fact, it is an interesting question why there have been no noisy protests from feminists at the degrading portrayal of women as the flower maidens in the second act, writhing around in fetching grass skirts and body stockings as they vainly try to persuade Parsifal to play with them. A politically correct *Parsifal* would have had to show Kundry karate-kicking Klingsor to take the spear away—thus saving the big lug Parsifal the nuisance of all that purity. Does opera get a special dispensation from NOW because it is so hopelessly old-fashioned anyway? Or is it just that all the feminists were watching *Sirens* over on ABC and so were none the wiser?

The only thing about the opera which seemed to me congenial to television was the idea of the holy fool. Looked at in one way, television restores to us a kind of innocence in taking away from us our sense of sin. The Fall of Man hardly even bruises when it is cushioned by the living-room carpet. There are no sinners on Oprah or Phil or Geraldo, only people who have made "mistakes" or behaved in "inappropriate" ways like Woody and Mia—two holy fools without a Gurnemanz or an Amfortas or a grail knight in sight to show them how to be just holy instead of just fools. As they are, so we shall be. Like Kundry to Parsifal the tube sings to us: "Be mine for only one hour. Let me make you a god for one hour and then be damned." Let us pray that some Power gives us the strength to return Parsifal's answer.

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Books

The great awakener

by Marc M. Arkin

On July 8, 1741, the Congregational Church of Enfield, Connecticut, passed into the history books. On that day, the assembled parishioners were treated to perhaps the single most famous sermon in American history, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Preached on the ominous text "Their foot shall slide in due time" (Deut. 32:35), the sermon featured the unforgettable image of the sinner suspended over the fires of hell, dangling from a slender thread like a spider or "some loathesome insect," whose fate is held by a God who "abhors you and is dreadfully provoked." Tradition has it that the visiting minister—a stranger to the congregation—delivered the sermon in a monotone, staring at the bellrope at the back of the church, while terrified churchgoers fell from their pews in agony at their unredeemed state. Strong men clung to the pillars of the meetinghouse and begged for mercy.

The speaker was not the celebrated George Whitefield, the Billy Graham of his day, who had lately toured New England with such spectacular success; nor was it any of the other itinerant evangelists who were beginning to upset the settled order of the colonial churches in the religious upheaval known as the Great Awakening. It was Jonathan Edwards, the greatest American theologian of the eighteenth century—and possibly of any other. Not simply a religious figure, Edwards was also, as John E. Smith claims in his new monograph,[1] the most acute American philosophical thinker before Charles Sanders Peirce, the late-nineteenth-century founder of pragmaticism.

Edwards was born in 1703 into the New England clerical elite. His father, Timothy Edwards, was the pastor of the Congregational Church in East Windsor, Connecticut. His maternal grandfather was Solomon Stoddard, whose influential pastorate in Northampton, Massachusetts, had yielded five separate seasons of religious revival and had earned him the unofficial title of "Pope of the Connecticut River Valley." Edwards attended the nascent Yale College, then an evangelical institution whose motto, "Lux et Veritas," was selected to differentiate it from the mere "Veritas" of its graceless rival on the Charles. After a brief pastorate in New York City and a stint as academic tutor at Yale, Edwards was ordained associate pastor of his eighty-four-year-old grandfather's congregation in 1727, becoming pastor when Stoddard died two years later. By this time, Edwards had discovered the new philosophy of John Locke and in his notebooks had marked out the major themes that would occupy the rest of his life: philosophical idealism, empirical observation, and a deep concern for the personal experience of religion.

At first, Edwards found his congregation "very insensible of the things of religion." Then, late in 1734, while in the middle of a

1 *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher*, by John E. Smith; University of Notre Dame Press, 150 pages, $23.95.

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closely reasoned sermon series on justification by faith, Edwards noticed a change. Through the spring and summer, the town enjoyed one of those seasons of religious quickening it had experienced under Stoddard, a revival of religion that quickly spread throughout the Connecticut River Valley. By 1737, when Edwards published his *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, the so-called "frontier revival" had waned; it was long cold a year later, when the *Discourses* that occasioned the revival appeared in print.

For the next eight years, Edwards distinguished himself as a participant in the Great Awakening, of which the Northampton revival was a precursor, and as a polemicist for experiential religion within the confines of traditional Calvinist doctrine. His most notable work of this period was *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746). In it, Edwards placed the wellspring of true religion in the lively inclinations that determine the heart and "the fountain of all the affections" in Christian love. Then, in 1748, a bitter dispute arose within his congregation. The chief cause was Edwards's insistence on an experiential test for admission to church membership, a practice abjured by his grandfather. The flashpoint occurred when Edwards proposed to discipline the children of some prominent Northampton families for circulating a "bad book," a midwives' manual. Edwards was dismissed from his church in 1750, after twenty-three years of service, with a wife and seven dependent children.

Rescue came in the form of a call to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a frontier town where the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and the Bay Colony's Board of Commissioners for Indian Affairs maintained a mission. Despite the strain of a double ministry, the Stockbridge years became the most productive of Edwards's life. During that time, he published the works familiarly known as *Freedom of the Will* (1754) and *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758). He also prepared the manuscript of *The Nature of True Virtue* (1755, first published in 1765) and began his epic narrative, *A History of the Work of Redemption*. Recognition of this remarkable intellectual outpouring came with a call to become president of Princeton University. Unfortunately, Edwards arrived in Princeton while the town was suffering a smallpox epidemic. Shortly after his installation in 1758, he died of an unsuccessful innoculation, not yet fifty-five years old.

Since the time of Perry Miller, the Harvard scholar who rediscovered the American Puritans, Edwards's reputation has been on the ascendant. Miller himself led the renewed interest in Edwards with his 1949 biography and his still matchless essay "From Edwards to Emerson," which grasped the essential continuity between Edwards's search for the "images and shadows of divine things" in nature and the Transcendentalism of later New England thinkers shed of the baggage of original sin. Nevertheless, like Hegel or Kant, Edwards is one of those thinkers that almost everyone likes to cite and almost no one has the fortitude to read. Laboring under a "ponderous prose" style, Edwards's philosophical works often suffer from being the other half of a polemical debate in which his opponents—and their positions—have long since passed into well-deserved obscurity. Even at their most vital, they partake of a sensibility not easily accessible to the modern reader.

John E. Smith is Clark Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Yale, and, since 1963, the general editor of the first critical edition of Edwards's writings, now running to some ten volumes. In this short book he has set out either to remedy Edwards's "inaccessibility" or to take advantage of it, depending on your perspective. Drawing largely from his own reading of Edwards and from the excellent critical introductions to the Yale series—particularly those of the philosopher Paul Ramsey and the late religious historian Clyde Holbrook—Smith provides a critical summary of each of Edwards's most important works. Beginning with a very brief biographical sketch, Smith sets the tone with a chapter entitled "Edwards's Thought and the

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Philosophy of Locke," which considers Edwards's creative appropriation of Lockean categories. Thereafter, Smith moves seriatim through chapters more or less devoted to summarizing *Religious Affections* and Edwards's other defenses of heart religion, *Freedom of the Will*, *Original Sin*, *The Nature of True Virtue*, and the unfinished *History of the Work of Redemption*.

While this treatment may be very useful for the perplexed graduate student faced with the original text, it has somewhat more limited value for the general reader. In particular, those looking for an intellectual biography of Edwards will be disappointed. In the first place, Smith's monograph lacks a sense of the development—or the unity—of Edwards's thought. In fact, it is rather weak with regard both to historical context and to chronology; this reader had to consult other reference works to obtain the dates of some of Edwards's works mentioned in this essay.

Instead, Smith seems concerned to place Edwards within the modern intellectual mainstream, stressing the empiricist bent in his thought and, somewhat improbably, attempting to palm off Edwards's sacred history as being uniquely "a century ahead of his time in his understanding of the historical order." As anyone familiar with Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) would acknowledge, New England divines spilled an inordinate amount of ink searching for the hand of God in history. In fact, Edwards's central aim was to search the historical record so that men might know when exactly God "shall take the kingdom," hardly a modern perspective. The task had a particular urgency since, for Edwards, "what is now seen in America, and especially in New England, may prove the dawn of that glorious day."

By reading Edwards out of his own context, Smith tends to downplay two very remarkable aspects of his thought and the extraordinary tension between them. The first is Edwards's perfect orthodoxy within the New England Calvinist tradition. Beginning with the first premise of the absolute sovereignty of God—a sovereignty so complete that Edwards could not admit of secondary causes such as free will—Edwards adhered to each and every doctrine of traditional Reformed theology: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. These were the touchstone of Edwards's world view.

The second is the powerful aesthetic strain in Edwards's thought, particularly his moral theology, which expressly equated virtue with the beauty of moral acts. Edwards described God as "infinitely the most beautiful and excellent [Being]: and all the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation, is but the reflection of the diffused beams of that Being." True virtue is nothing less than the love of being to that beauty which is Being in general. God's creative urgency is the continuous overflowing of His own love to Being. Original sin is the loss of man's ability to participate in this cycle of divine love; as images of divine beauty, natural beauty and virtue give the truly spiritual a foretaste of the divine. In this light, one might well consider the following passage from Edwards's *Personal Narrative*:

> The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since was on reading those words (1 Tim. 1:17), *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever*. . . . Not long after I first began to experience these things . . . I walked abroad alone, in a solitary place in my father's pasture for contemplation. And, as I was walking there and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious *majesty* and *grace* of God, that I know not how to express. . . . God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in every thing; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and in all nature.

Is it any wonder that William Ellery Channing placed Edwards among the pantheists,

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for whom the mystery is why there is anything else in creation but God? And yet, at the same time, Edwards truly felt the radical separation of fallen man from the beauty of both this world and the world unseen. Perhaps the most serious limitation of Smith's essay is that it fails to convey this most immediate element of Edwards's thought and thus does not encourage its audience to seek what is most vital in the original.

Improbable friendship

Gustave Flaubert & George Sand
Flaubert-Sand: The Correspondence.
Translated from the French by
Francis Steegmuller & Barbara Bray.
Based on the French edition
by Alphonse Jacobs.
Knopf, 428 pages, $35

reviewed by Renee Winegarten

When, in 1866, after a literary dinner at Magny's restaurant in Paris, the petite George Sand (*née* Aurore Dupin) confessed to a particular sympathy for a toweringly tall bachelor fellow guest, Gustave Flaubert, she was sixty-two, while he was in his early forties, a mere two years older than Maurice, her only son. True, her affections—and indeed passions—had frequently been engaged by men young enough to be Maurice's siblings. Three years before, much to Flaubert's gratification, she had written a laudatory review of his Carthaginian novel, *Salammbô*, whose gory exoticism had bemused the public. She knew he was a genius. Soon, she was invited to stay with Flaubert and his mother at their house at Croisset, outside Rouen—a rare privilege. In his study overlooking the Seine, they smoked, read to each other from their work in progress, and discussed literature (his favorite subject) into the small hours, when, feeling hungry, they descended to the kitchen to partake of cold chicken.

In the following ten years, until George Sand's death in 1876, the two troubadours, as they liked to call themselves, were to meet from time to time in Paris; she would revisit Croisset, while Flaubert (though urged repeatedly) would stay rarely at her country mansion at Nohant. They pursued through letters—with constant protestations of mutual affection and regard, and with offers of assistance in times of trouble—their conversation about writing, politics, society, humanity, and the state of the world. On very few topics did they actually see eye to eye. Their discourse embodies not just the difference between generations but also two possible responses to fate: on Flaubert's side, disillusionment, rage, and scorn for human folly; on Sand's, the touching persistence of hope in the face of experience.

For years readers were reduced to contenting themselves with inadequate versions of this extraordinary duet, until the masterly edition produced by the late Alphonse Jacobs was published in 1981. The present English translation, by Francis Steegmuller for Flaubert and Barbara Bray for Sand, solidly based upon the Jacobs edition, makes available to the general English-speaking public one of the most fascinating and entertaining records of an unlikely friendship between two eminent literary figures of differing experience, temperament, taste, and outlook—a major document of perennial human interest.

At the moment of their first meeting, George Sand still enjoyed world-wide and often controversial renown for her daring views on relations between the sexes and the social classes, her one-time socialist and revolutionary politics, her anticlericalism at a period when the Church was a powerful instrument of reaction. On the other hand, Flaubert was known principally as the author of that scandalously "immoral" novel, *Madame Bovary*, a somewhat enigmatic figure to the public at large, and one whose time was yet to come (as Sand fully realized). It was her writings that had influenced many of the leading literary and political figures of the age from London to Berlin, from Boston to Saint Petersburg.

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George Sand belonged with those vast, exuberant, tirelessly energetic, larger-than-life contemporaries of hers like Balzac, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas *père*. From 1831, after leaving her limited and faithless husband for a bohemian existence in Paris with her lover, Jules Sandeau, she had earned her living by journalism, becoming a celebrated essayist, a fecund and varied novelist, a seeker after justice for women, early utopian socialist, government propagandist during the Second Republic in 1848, brilliant autobiographer, successful playwright—to name a few of her activities. Moreover, she had notoriously expressed her passion for life, her quest for freedom, and her feminine revolt through a long line of lovers: not least among them were the poet and dramatist Alfred de Musset (a much discussed theatrical affair) and the delicate Frédéric Chopin (to whom she devoted nine years of care in the protected ambience he needed for his nocturnes and other compositions).

At the same time as she kept up her prodigious output in life and art, she was corresponding with many important writers and political thinkers throughout Europe. Notwithstanding some losses, her marvelous collected letters in the exemplary edition by Georges Lubin run to some twenty-five volumes. Henry James, who was fascinated by her, later amusingly called her "the figure of the greatest of all women of letters, of Letters in truth most exactly." George Sand was curious about everything; whereas once Flaubert had found his direction, he constantly reiterated the same opinions and attitudes, the same "*H*indignation" about everything. It took George Sand to perceive the repressed romanticism and the tenderness buried beneath the bluster.

In his youth, Flaubert had admired her early novels, especially the influential *Jacques*, on woman's right to passion. This literary admiration for Sand—like that of Henry James—had declined with the years, as he began to shape his own views on the supremacy of art and the subservience of life to it. To his mistress, the poet Louise Colet, he had once commented crudely that Sand's "writing oozes, and the idea seeps out between the words as from between flabby thighs." Still, in some respects *Madame Bovary* might be regarded as a caustic, oblique response to Sand's notions of woman's right to liberty and happiness. Sand's novels, after all, are among the works that—like the books of chivalry charged with turning Don Quixote's wits—set Emma Bovary on the path that leads to her terrible death.

The Sand-Flaubert correspondence brings to mind the saying of the Greek poet Archilochus (words which inspired Isaiah Berlin's resonant essay): "The fox knows many things but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Sand is the fox who knew many things (including love of nature, of family life, of her grandchildren), while Flaubert is the hedgehog who knew one big thing—Art with a capital A—more or less to perfection. Yet it is Flaubert who has had to take a battering from Sartre as the bourgeois writer *par excellence* who sacrificed life to art, made literature into a religion, and vented his bile against that icon of the French Left, the Paris Commune of 1871. The attack on Flaubert stands as an attack on the value of literature itself. In contrast, George Sand has suffered no such indignity, for, with the revisions of feminist criticism and the attempt to overthrow the so-called patriarchal canon, the once neglected works of George Sand are being reprinted, translated, and re-examined from every conceivable angle in a veritable Sandian industry.

Sand was the dreamer (beautifully caught by Delacroix in the double portrait with Chopin that was cut up by some vandal), the Aeolian harp touched by every breeze of the age, and open to every change and new development. It was she who famously expressed the despair of the female Byron in *Lélia*; gave voice to the phony revolutionary in *Horace* (to be developed by Turgenev); shaped the enduring novel of left-wing sympathy with *Simon*; lauded the female artist-*cum*-humanitarian in *Consuelo*. Yet comparatively few of her works achieved formal perfection. They could be fascinating

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new departures, like the spiritual thriller *Spiridion*, which inspired Renan and Dostoevsky, leading others in fresh directions of their own.

In comparison with Sand's flood of variety, Flaubert produced a small if deep river. He insisted that literature should be impersonal: "Has God ever expressed an opinion?" he inquired rhetorically. Yet he could famously remark elsewhere that "Madame Bovary is myself." For Sand, impersonality in literature was not only impossible, it was also anti-human. Basically, she agreed with the poet Boileau that writing reveals willy-nilly the character of the writer. Flaubert gave much time to detailed research, often on recondite matters. It seemed to her that he did not always take the reader sufficiently into account, and that some of his work (like *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, for instance) could only appeal to a small circle. For his great novel *L'Education sentimentale*, Flaubert was happy to consult George Sand on the Revolution of 1848, with whose luminaries she had been closely involved. He would spend hours struggling over the choice of a word, eliminating intrusive relative pronouns, bewailing the agonies he suffered in what he called "les affres du style." She suggested once that perhaps he complained constantly about his labors in order to win sympathy. Everyone acquainted with him knew that he was prone to exaggeration.

As for herself, she liked to give the impression that life came first. What was her historical novel *Consuelo*, with its sequel, *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (three large, amply researched volumes)? One of the seminal works of the century, it was regarded by Henry James as her masterpiece, but, she airily claimed to Flaubert, she had forgotten all about it. She told him that she was not writing for posterity, adding that she was quite resigned to being forgotten. This from an author who spent long hours at her inkwell, often from 7 A.M. to 5 P.M., or "working day and night," as she told one correspondent, enjoying only four hours' sleep and suffering from migraine. She did revise her pages, and sometimes entirely rewrote her stories, so that there are two quite different published versions of her novel *Lélia*. Over thirty prefaces and scattered observations on her art throughout her works and letters betray the fact that she was far from indifferent to it. Protestations of casualness in the letters to Flaubert and elsewhere form part of a strategy to avoid the dread appellation of "bluestocking," usually employed about women who wrote books. Flaubert fell into this trap when he commented that Sand was no bluestocking, meaning that she did not fit the contemporary stereotype of the woman writer.

In that age, a woman was supposed to write solely for money, in order to support her family. Consequently, Sand always asserted that she wrote out of necessity, and to meet the claims on her generosity. Flaubert, on the other hand, with his private income (until he shared in the ruin of his niece's husband), maintained that he did not write for filthy lucre. Yet he was absolutely furious when he thought that his publisher, Michel Lévy, had reneged on his word and was doing him down. Sand, who was no dreamer when it came to practical and financial affairs, told Flaubert that he was being naïve, that Lévy would stand by a written contract. In her early days, she had held her own with a publisher who had failed to pay her the same amount as he gave her masculine colleagues.

Were Sand and Flaubert always sincere in their correspondence? Vain query. They were writers of fiction, after all, used to adopting different identities, desirous of pleasing each other as friends. After an extremely stormy life, lived to the full, Sand was projecting her maternal side in the role of the good mother to Flaubert, showering him with sensible advice. With a great struggle she had won through to a much proclaimed serenity that amazed him, consumed as he was with anger and despair at the course of modern life.

Usually complimentary on certain aspects of her plays and novels in his letters to her, Flaubert confessed (to Turgenev and others) that she was too full of the milk of human

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kindness. He observed that Sand and her attempts to console him sometimes got on his nerves. Besides, he thought that she was far too "democratic." Where Sand favored universal suffrage, Flaubert was passionately opposed to it. What he wanted was government by "mandarins" who would establish the reign of "Science." When he visited Nohant with Turgenev in 1873, Sand found Flaubert "exhausting": she was growing weary of his rages and prejudices. She felt irritated when he kept on about literature while she wanted to relax. To her mind, Turgenev proved a more cheerful and accommodating guest.

Sand and Flaubert discussed sexual matters in their letters. What did they not discuss? He made the mistake of writing to her about woman as "the ribbed vault of the infinite." Sand was not to be fobbed off with such nonsense in relation to a man like the poet and critic Sainte-Beuve, who (as she knew) was paying underage girls to try to restore his potency. Flaubert might vow a lifelong impossible love for Elisa Schlésinger, but in the salon of the courtesan Jane de Tourbey he could also talk about beating women or being beaten by them. He once boasted that he had chosen the ugliest prostitute in a brothel and had copulated with her in full view while keeping a cigar in his mouth. The Second Empire was not the moment for masculine refinement.

To match in irony Flaubert on the ribbed vault of the infinite, Sand made the egregious error of advising him to take a mistress (he was in fact not exactly deprived in that department) or to marry. Nonetheless, she herself had criticized the shortcomings of the institution of marriage in her books. The joke is that, years before, she had vowed that she would rather spend the rest of her life in prison than marry again. In her long liaison with Alexandre Manceau, the roles were reversed: he was, as it were, the spouse who laid out the pens and the slippers for her.

On one side in the letters between Sand and Flaubert there stands the passion for life, and, on the other, not only disgust but the fear of life (which Flaubert once admitted to her); here, the scattered energy of multifarious activity, and there, the refuge of the ivory tower against a hated world. Whatever their own inclination, readers will discover in the vivid dialogue of these two giants a very rare treat indeed.

A vision in terry cloth

Brad Leithauser Seaward.
Knopf, 384 pages, $23

reviewed by David Klinghoffer

Although it's not possible to write fiction while you are stone-out asleep, mediocre novels have a way of sounding as if they were written while the author was, at least, under sedation. Better writers, on the other hand, give the impression of being consistently wide awake; while great ones, aware of sensations and connections their readers never realized, seem to inhabit a kind of super-waking reality.

In his first two novels, Brad Leithauser offered the chance to spend time with someone whose view of the world around him is perfectly clear, unfogged by the sleepydust of complacency and cliché. Picking up one of these books is like picking up a new pair of eyeglasses at the optometrist, with a new and stronger prescription. A trained lawyer and a poet, Leithauser published his first novel, *Equal Distance*, in 1984. In the mid-Eighties, the bookshops were full of coming-of-age novels about young Americans who travel to Japan to absorb the funny foreign culture and teach English to the funny squint-eyed natives. *Equal Distance* was by far the best of these, which, given the competition (the closest being *Ransom*, by Jay McInerney), doesn't tell you much.

The dryness of Leithauser's comic take on the Japanese is apparent from the moment Danny Ott, one of Leithauser's Midwestern boy heroes, arrives at Narita Airport. The Japan presented here is a sort of half-cracked mirror image of America. The Orient turns out to be not so mysterious after all.

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Coffee shops are decorated with signs in cockeyed English, promising "WORLD SMELL IN CUPFUL." In Danny's first encounter with a Japanese person, a crazed cab driver, the cabbie greets him with whoops of *Amerika nambaa wan! Amerika nambaa wan!* "For a moment Danny didn't understand what he was saying," comments Leithauser. Then "Danny felt certain he was heading in the wrong direction—going the wrong way without his luggage and with the meter running. He resolved to stop the cab when the meter hit two thousand yen, but knew, even as he vowed it, that he would probably be afraid to." There's nothing cutesy about the scene, as there surely would have been had McInerney written it.

Leithauser has lived in Japan, and obviously listened to its people carefully. He also does American voices and manners admirably well. The best character in *Equal Distance* is a pompous young expatriate named Greg Blaising, who, though knowing hardly a word of Japanese, takes it on himself to explain for Danny all of Japan's idiosyncrasies, as well as the idiosyncrasies of its temporary American residents. His comments on their fellow expatriates include a perfect explanation as to why Greg can't wear a backpack: "A moustached American wearing a backpack as he wanders off into the Kyoto hills? I'm afraid I just can't . . ."

At his best, Leithauser is not only funny but moving, in a way that is at once modest and unapologetic. This is a man who, for one thing, makes no secret about loving women, and fills his male protagonists, young and not so young, with an innocent longing for them which, in our cynical and perverse time, can come as a shock. He describes the way Danny, after falling in, out, and back in love with a young American named Carrie, finds that his feeling for her is so "suffusing . . . that it brims over to color the way he draws on his shirt in the morning . . ., or the way he drives in their rented Granada . . ., or tears with a very sharp knife into another steak." To remind us of the way love changes even such mundane, tossed-off activities, you need to be awake to notice it.

Hence (1989), Leithauser's second novel, also has Midwestern heroes: Timothy and Garner Briggs. The first is a chess genius, engaged to do chess-playing battle with a computer—he is no less than the great white hope of the human race, chess-wise. Garner is his older brother, an overly dignified professor at Harvard Law School. The chess match takes place in Boston, which gives the Briggs brothers many days' worth of opportunity to ricochet their utterly incompatible personalities off each other.

There was once, for a short time, a third brother, Timothy's twin, Tommy. Leithauser recalls:

> . . . a young boy in Victoria, Indiana, plummets from a playground slide and comes home from school with a white adhesive bandage on his head. Clearly man was not born to fly. This bandage makes him something of a family celebrity, especially in the eyes of his twin brother, who regards him, and the bandage, with awe and envy. There is worry that the wound will leave a scar, but after much discussion, and much repetition of the reassuring words of the school nurse, the dinner-table consensus is that probably it will not. The twins are sent to bed early, since one of them seems a little dazed or drowsy. And one of them wakes the next morning, and one does not.

The understated concision of that passage gives you some idea of Leithauser's style throughout the book. *Hence*, too, is about types of longing: unacknowledged longing by the two brothers and their widowed mother for the silenced Tommy, Timmy's longing for a certain woman (an employee of Congam, the computer conglomerate that owns his opponent in the match), above all the longing for self-expression, even on the part of semi-conscious machines. The book's last sentences (don't worry: this gives nothing away) should chill anyone who works with a machine even as uncomplicated as a word-processor: "They are, all of them, protesting, if they could form a genuine protest, they are making demands, if they knew how to shape a demand. The din of their longings

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so thickens the air that it takes some time to discern what would be, if only there were words, the initial message intended for you. *Give me a voice*, they would say." These books are worth returning to.

It is also from the "din of longings" that Leithauser takes the themes of his new book. Terry Seward (mispronounced "Seaward"), a Washington, D.C., lawyer and native of Iowa, more or less a grown-up Danny Ott, has lost his wife in a swimming accident. A year later he seems to have settled down to the eventless, impotent life of a bachelor, when his dead wife appears to him in a vision—wearing, of all things, an old T-shirt of his and a white terry-cloth bath towel around her waist. What could this mean? It means a brilliant opportunity to explore the competing claims of the natural and supernatural world views, the resolution of which conflict is Terry's goal from page 91 on.

Terry has long felt an "odd inarticulate disgruntled sensation"—his own type of longing—"one burrowing all the way back into his childhood—that there was something, some not yet divulged something, for which, or to serve which, he had been placed upon this planet." Could it be his fate to confront the mystery of a natural world in which ghosts of deceased wives appear to their living husbands, in run-down Virginia vacation cabins, wearing T-shirts and towels? Now, this confrontation is a fascinating thing to long for.

In a novel by Graham Greene, on the protagonist's resolution of that dilemma would hang nothing less than the fate of his mortal soul. Not here. Whereas Greene was, typically, agonizingly wide-awake, *Seaward* would seem to be a novel by a writer who got too much sleep the night before. There is something woozy about Leithauser's performance. The book makes a bad joke at the expense of Greene's seriousness: for Leithauser, the struggle between the natural and supernatural views has few consequences, if any at all.

Instead, while Terry goes about the business of dropping out of his law firm to pursue research into paranormal experiences, the theme of supernatural and natural is used merely as a backdrop, mostly to a lot of banter among Terry and a couple of his buddies—banter so witless Leithauser has to keep reminding us how witty it is. So after Adam, a colleague from the firm, has made some mild smart-alecky remark to Kevin, Terry's old roommate from college days at Princeton, Leithauser has Kevin pause "to peer at Adam, in evident reappraisal, seemingly having glimpsed for the first time that here was somebody who . . . could be formidable. It wasn't for nothing that Adam, in a highly competitive business himself, had risen to the top."

As for Kevin, Leithauser claims for him, among other qualities, "psychological acuteness," which is utterly lacking from the character as we meet him on the page. Kevin becomes Terry's guru, and boils down Terry's dilemma to a simple-minded dichotomy: either Terry saw a real supernatural entity or he is a "loonie." No intermediate positions are considered.

Leithauser is more clear-eyed about Terry, whom Kevin rightly tags as "determinedly vapid." And perhaps this gets most directly to the problem with *Seaward*. During a session of introspecting by Terry and Kevin, Terry breaks down and, "solemn as Moses," asks if he can go back to calling Kevin by his college nickname, "Squirrely." (Leithauser delights in dumb nicknames.) At the nadir of his personal crisis, Terry withdraws into his comfortable home, where he builds a large fish-tank and hangs around all day in his pajamas. He putters. It's very difficult to write an incisive novel about a vapid man, and Leithauser hasn't done it.

This isn't to say that *Seaward* is entirely without merit. While its three leading characters slip quickly from consciousness, several minor ones are delineated with all the sharpness of Leithauser's first two books. These range from Terry's awkward secretary, Bertha, to a Vietnamese cab driver. Leithauser can let you know a woman is fat without saying it, just by her choice of words. This is a mysterious talent. Or, with-

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out documenting his physical characteristics body part by body part, he can, to perfection, make you see Terry's father:

> Terry began to discover his father in all sorts of movies—old movies, invariably, the black-and-white sort, in which Dad was always cast in the role of the "little man": he was one of the jittery small town investors who came clamoring into Jimmy Stewart's savings and loan association desperate to withdraw his little stake in *It's a Wonderful Life*; he was one of the downtrodden longshoremen who shuffled fretfully from side to side as Marlon Brando exhorted them to toss out corrupt Lee J. Cobb in *On the Waterfront*; he was standing in Grand Central Station when a mortified William Powell, playing a seamy politician, found himself wandering in his pajamas through a subway station in *The Senator Was Indiscreet* . . .

There are other moments when Leithauser's power as a poet—the power to encapsulate years of hope and disappointment in a single word—clicks on, as in Terry's recollection of a party game played not long before his wife drowned. The host had asked each guest to write on a slip of paper the single word that best describes himself or herself. Stolid Betsy Seward chose "ARTISTIC." "Oh but my own dear love, dear girl, dear heart, what in the world were you *thinking* . . . in that huddled, private moment of composition?" Terry won't ever know, and the realization is as painful to him as to us.

It might almost be a different author, a different Brad Leithauser, who orchestrates the events of *Seaward* as they lead onward to the climactic wedding scene worthy of Hollywood "contemporary comedy." You half expect Alan Alda to turn up on the scene, making a cameo appearance and hugging everyone he can get his hands on. All the interesting possibilities Leithauser started out with are ungraciously shoved from under the bridal canopy, as the novel marches forward to its unmerited happy ending.

No cheesecake is served at the wedding, so far as we are told, but plenty is eaten in the course of the novel: mostly by Kevin and Terry, who are forever scarfing the stuff down. This is unfortunate, as it establishes a distasteful association: of cheesecake, with *Seaward*. The book is, in too many ways, the novelistic equivalent of the fatty dessert: sweet and soft, it's nothing you are likely to want to pick up after it's sat a year out on the bookshelf.

Resentful parasite

Thomas F. Staley & Randolph Lewis, editors
Reflections on James Joyce:
Stuart Gilbert's Paris Journal.
Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center/University of Texas Press,
103 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Jeffrey Meyers

Stuart Gilbert (1883-1969) took a First at Oxford, joined the Indian Civil Service in 1907, and spent nearly twenty years as a hanging judge in Burma, where, toward the end of his long career, he was a contemporary of George Orwell's. Gilbert once sentenced a Burmese to death for murder, but after the man used political influence to escape the penalty, Gilbert chatted affably with him when they met. Gilbert also had a brief stint in Mesopotamia in 1918-19, two years after T. E. Lawrence tried to bribe the Turkish generals to raise the siege of Kut. In his introduction to Gilbert's *Paris Journal*, Thomas Staley writes: "Although Burma was an English colony, a version of French remained the practical language of civil administration." But Burma was not a British colony; it was administered as part of India until 1937. Though adjacent to Indo-China, it had never been under French rule and remained independent until the British finally conquered the country after the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. Under British rule, as one would expect and as Orwell and Maurice Collis's *Trials in Burma* (1938) confirm, English was the language of civil administration. (Less serious errors occur on page 90, where the names of Stanley Spencer

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and Geoffrey Wolff are misspelled, and on page 51, where "*alla* Lucia" is correct in Italian and requires no tedious *sic*.) Much more is needed in the brief introduction, especially since the book itself is so short, on Gilbert's background, education, character, career in Burma, marriage, wife, and children (if any). It would also be useful to know about the quality of his numerous translations and the events of his later life. And Staley offers no explanation of why Gilbert is pensioned off yet so worried about money, so physically exhausted and utterly world-weary, so arrogant and yet so full of doubts, so caustic, acrimonious, and dyspeptic.

In 1927, according to Gilbert himself and Joyce's biographer Richard Ellmann (Staley gives the date as 1925), Gilbert, who had recently retired from Burma and settled in Paris, saw passages from a forthcoming French translation of *Ulysses* in the window of Sylvia Beach's bookstore, Shakespeare & Company. He informed her that the translation was inadequate and Beach passed this unwelcome information to Joyce, who called Gilbert and arranged a meeting. This eventually led to Gilbert's collaboration on the French *Ulysses* that appeared in 1929, to his pioneering book (written with Joyce's assistance) *James Joyce's "Ulysses": A Study* (1930; revised 1952), to his editing and introducing the first volume of Joyce's *Letters* (1957), and to an uneasy friendship that lasted until Joyce's death in 1941.

Though Sylvia Beach said of Gilbert: "I don't think anybody, except perhaps Joyce, knew as much about [*Ulysses*] as he did," Joyce told Nabokov in 1937 that his collaboration on Gilbert's study of *Ulysses* was "a terrible mistake, an advertisement for the book. I regret it very much." Yet Joyce also suggested that Gilbert write his biography and Gilbert, realizing he would be controlled by Joyce, declined the task. Besides placing himself at Joyce's service for fourteen years, Gilbert translated several seminal works into English: Edouard Dujardin's *We'll to the Woods No More* (1938), which Joyce cited as an early, influential example of stream-of-consciousness writing, Martin du Gard's *The Thibaults* (1939), Saint-Exupéry's *Night Flight* (1942), Sartre's *No Exit* (1946), Camus's *The Plague* (1948), and Malraux's *Voices of Silence* (1953).

Gilbert's journal, which runs from January 1929 to March 1934, is complemented by an acidulous two-page note on Joyce, Herbert Gorman, and Paul Léon, prompted by Gorman's biography of Joyce in 1941, and by seven previously unpublished notes from Joyce to Gilbert. Unfortunately, the most interesting of the Joyce-Gilbert letters have been suppressed by the always difficult Joyce Estate, and those included in this volume are trivial and even faintly absurd. One postcard, sent from Hamlet's castle in Elsinore, reads in its entirety: "Greetings from here." This book is useful because we want to know as much as possible about Joyce; it is disappointing because it does not tell us very much that is new about him. If, as Gilbert suggests, Joyce was a radically defective human being who wasted the last two decades of his life on the dead end of *Finnegans Wake*, then it is difficult (though not impossible) to justify the publication of this insubstantial book.

Staley writes that "this journal is clearly at odds with the previously published comments that Gilbert made." It would be more accurate to say that the journal bluntly states the views he had expressed more diplomatically when, after Joyce's death, reverence had obliterated resentment. In his introduction to the *Letters*, Gilbert states that Joyce used "his incomparable command of the English tongue merely to play havoc with it." In the journal, written some twenty-five years earlier, while intensely irritated by Joyce's literary personal megalomania, he disapproves of Joyce's collecting girls' magazines (which influenced the epistolary style of Leopold Bloom's daughter, Milly, in *Ulysses*) for use in *Finnegans Wake*. He also dislikes having to read aloud to Joyce the entries for thirty cities in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: "Whenever I come to a name (of a street, suburb, park, etc.) I pause. Joyce thinks. If he can Anglicise the word, i.e. make a pun on it,

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[we] record the name or its deformation in the notebook. Thus 'Slotspark' [Castle Park] (I think) at Christiania [Oslo] becomes Sluts' park. He collects all queer names in this way and will soon have a notebook full of them. The system seems bad." Though it would be difficult to conceive a more mechanical or boring way to write a book, Joyce defended himself by declaring: "I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality." Evelyn Waugh, however, agreed with Gilbert when he observed of Joyce in his *Paris Review* interview: "He started off writing very well, then you can watch him going mad with vanity. He ends up a lunatic."

Overweening vanity, in his work and in his life, accounts for many of Gilbert's charges against Joyce. In his note on Gorman's biography, Gilbert is perceptive about the complexities and contradictions in the "real Joyce—a great man with a little mind; highly sensitive and quite ruthless; a natural intriguer, born litigant, slave driver, and on occasion, the most charming companion; so self-centered that he took no interest in others [i.e., Gilbert] except in their relations to himself." This was later softened, in the introduction to the *Letters*, to "Joyce was not an easy person to be intimate with" and "claimed assistance and allegiance from his friends, publishers, agents and fellow-artists as a right." In Paris bars, for example, when the timid, weak-eyed, but aggressive genius got into dangerously drunken disputes with strangers he could scarcely see, he would turn to his huge companion and exclaim: "Deal with him, Hemingway! Deal with him!" The "diplomatic handling of prickly situations" in the introduction becomes in the journal a Byzantine manipulation of loyal friends: "[Joyce's] fixed principle is—never act oneself, cultivate ostensible 'aloofness' and pull strings."

Grateful for the friendship of a genius but annoyed by his imperious behavior and resentful of the way Joyce exploits him, Gilbert pours into his journal the cathartic comments he dare not voice directly to the Master. In the journal, Joyce, grumpy and unwilling to help (as he had promised) with Gilbert's book on *Ulysses*, is "a spoilt god." Narcissistic, selfish, and even paranoid, Joyce is also greedy, extravagant, and ruined by his patrons' money, which allows him to "follow caprice instead of sticking to his work."

Gilbert criticizes the Joyces' hostility to Jews, even though the son, Giorgio, is married to one and the daughter, Lucia, engaged to another. To Joyce, the provincial Dubliner, "foreign is funny." But Gilbert himself expresses traditional English prejudice about the Irish. "The Irishman is accustomed to sloppiness," Gilbert notes. "Whiners & blusterers, the Irish all." He also records Joyce's frequent drunkenness, another typical Irish weakness. When Joyce makes "a fool of himself" (though he is quite a nimble dancer), his wife, Nora, compels him to leave a lively party. On another occasion Joyce gets blind drunk, falls off a chair and on to the floor, and babbles unintelligibly. His habitual drinking makes Nora threaten to leave him. She cannot endure his "tumbling about" every night, blames him for their unbearable life, and wishes he would drown himself. But he wins her round, and they resume their fretful and capricious existence.

Another problem is the schizophrenic Lucia, who, like Zelda Fitzgerald, was treated by Dr. Forel at Prangins Clinic near Geneva. Joyce complains to Gilbert that Lucia is not "normal" and cannot stick to anything, but, writes Gilbert, "Joyce in quest of normality in his family is comic." Joyce arranges an operation to correct Lucia's squint, which he claims some people find attractive, but does not know how to handle her. Conceited, idle, and illiterate in three languages, spoiled and selfish like her father, Lucia is allowed to rest in bed instead of getting "the smacking she rightly deserves." Gilbert believes what Joyce is reluctant to accept: that Lucia is "genuinely out of her wits" and ought to be confined in a madhouse.

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Gilbert's acrimony extends well beyond the Joyce family to professional singers whose voices do nothing more than "talk at concerts," the "capering bitches" of the Russian ballet, and the pandemic lack of "decent conduct or aesthetic taste." He particularly dislikes his personal rival Paul Léon, the sweet-tempered Russian Jew who was later arrested by the Nazis and murdered in a concentration camp. "I am no longer useful," Gilbert mordantly observes, "as [Joyce] has a permanently attached slave" in the half-witted and doggedly devoted Léon.

Gilbert could neither withdraw from Joyce nor accept the rather astringent terms of his friendship. He recorded the activities of the Joyce circle though the people did not interest him, and even doubted the worth of his own work: "What have I to say—merely eternal commentaries on J.J.?" But the real cause of Gilbert's bitterness was his recognition of the vast difference between Joyce's creative imagination and his own rather arid intellect: "It is a sad fate to be a parasite, incapable of acting for oneself—to have ideas, but not constructive ones; to be able to express oneself, but with nothing to express. . . . Are other people's ideas, then, more real to me than my own?"

The tongue of the Welsh

R. S. Thomas
Collected Poems, 1940-1990.
Dent, 548 pages, £25

reviewed by Michael Glover

There have been three notable poetical Thomases in our century: Edward, meditative pastoralist (and boon companion to Robert Frost), who died in the Great War; the mercurial Dylan, whose reputation has been sustained in part by the tawdry legend of his life; and R. S., Wales's greatest living poet, who turned eighty this spring and whose birthday was marked by the publication of his *Collected Poems, 1940-1990*.

Though all of Welsh derivation, none of these men was Welsh-speaking—and to all but R. S. it seems to have mattered little that the tongue of their forefathers was not their own. The Welshness of Dylan, according to many (and perhaps unfairly), found its principal outlet in his life. It is, of course, highly visible in his prose too—the marvelous reminiscences of his Swansea childhood, for example, that he recorded for BBC radio in the 1940s; and in *Under Milk Wood*, of course, that sole attempt that he made, so late on in his short life, to write a play for radio. But in the poetry? Formally, certainly, in the intricate patterning of rhyme structure and meter; but less so in the matter and the language of the poems, which so often depend for their success upon an uncanny vatic force that is not especially Welsh because, in the opinion of R. S., the Welsh are not much inclined to mysticism anyway. Their spirituality resides in their surroundings:

> Anyone who can feel for the life of the Welsh countryside has experienced something too strong and too profound to be ascribed to another world, or another life. Here, in the soil and the dirt and the peat do we find life and heaven and hell, and it is in these surroundings that a Welshman should forge his soul . . .

The situation is, nevertheless, curious and sad and worth remarking upon: here are three important poets of Welsh derivation who, thanks to historical circumstance, were robbed of their language by the colonizing English. And for that, paradoxically, we must give praise because they have all left us great poems in English, thus, at one stroke, depriving us of the need to learn a language quite so difficult as Welsh is said to be, and spreading the potential audience for their poetry to the farthest reaches of the English-speaking world.

Ronald Stuart Thomas was born in Cardiff, that racial and linguistic melting-pot, and his childhood was a peripatetic one. His father, an officer in the Merchant Navy during the First World War, kept his small family per-

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petually on the move—after Cardiff came Birkenhead, and then Holyhead. According to R. S., it was his father who first made him aware, as a very small child, of the majestic presence of the hills of Wales—symbol of a land lost and waiting to be reclaimed by a giant leap of the imagination. Thereafter, R. S. began to nurture a dream of Wales and Welshness, a dream of some day reclaiming a lost birthright . . .

His mother persuaded him to enter the Church, and his first curacy was on the Borders—a land neither properly Welsh nor properly English, from which the Welsh tongue itself had long since disappeared. He wanted desperately to learn the language—but who was there to teach him? And how could he *get* to a teacher during those harsh years of petrol rationing? It was a primitive place that he had come to, a hill country, dauntingly, pitilessly beautiful, about which even the bishop who recommended it to him knew precious little.

His trajectory as a minister of the church described a slow ellipse, bringing him ever closer to the Welsh-speaking heartland of Northwest Wales, where he had his last living and has continued to live since his retirement a dozen years ago in a cottage that overlooks the sea.

He had learned the language to his satisfaction by the age of thirty, and he has used it as much as possible ever since, conducting services in Welsh and cultivating a small circle of like-minded, Welsh-speaking acquaintances. And yet, in a sense, it had always been too late. In spite of the fact that he wrote his autobiography, *Neb*, in Welsh in 1985, it is not an achievement of which he is particularly proud, and he will not permit it to be translated into English. It is written for the Welsh, that is as much as he will say about it.

All the poetry has been written in English, and he first came to be recognized as a poet in the 1940s, when he published a trio of collections with small Welsh presses. These early groups of poems, celebrations of the Welsh landscape, analyses of the hearts and the minds of the people he was moving among, have a powerful Yeatsian music, and none more so than the poem for which he is best known from this period, "A Peasant":

> Iago Prytherch his name, though, be it allowed,
> Just an ordinary man of the bald Welsh hills,
> Who pens a few sheep in a gap of cloud.
> Docking mangels, chopping the green skin
> From the yellow bones with a half-witted grin
> Of satisfaction, or churning the crude earth
> To a stiff sea of clouds that glint in the wind—
> So are his days spent, his spittled mirth
> Rarer than the sun that cracks the cheeks
> Of the gaunt sky perhaps once in a week.
> And then at night see him fixed in his chair
> Motionless, except when he leans to gob
> in the fire.
> There is something frightening in the vacancy
> of his mind.
> His clothes, sour with years of sweat
> And animal contact, shock the refined,
> But affected, sense with their stark naturalness.
> Yet this is your prototype, who, season by
> season
> Against siege of rain and the wind's attrition,
> Preserves his stock, an impregnable fortress
> Not to be stormed even in death's confusion.
> Remember him, then, for he, too, is a winner
> of wars,
> Enduring like a tree under the curious stars.

This poem got Thomas into a deal of trouble after it was written. It is based upon an actual incident, he explains when asked: the sighting of a peasant on some hilltop field docking mangels, hard, primitive labor in those days before the advent of mechanization. He is a rude, boorish man, it seems, the kind that would as leave gob into the fireback as muse upon matters parsonical with the robed gentleman who hesitates in the doorway. Thomas is at a distance from these people—indeed, here as elsewhere, he does not hold back from criticizing them for their guileful, crabbed, misanthropic natures. The portrait itself is one that the Welsh-speaking, poetry-reading public of the Wales of those days was not especially partial to—they thought it a touch crude and condescending perhaps, for all that Thomas

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himself might argue to the contrary. In fact, the argument he offered in its defense in a recent interview sounded a touch disingenuous: this was not a Welsh-speaking hill shepherd at all, he said, who would be a natural reader—and even a writer—of poetry, but one of the poorer Borders types, who had lost his heritage and, in losing it, all trace of good manners too . . .

It was in the 1940s that Thomas had more than a spark of optimism about Wales, the Welsh, and the ancestral tongue. He even participated in the Anglo-Welsh literary movement, which he regarded in those days as a step in the direction of the reconstitution of Wales as an independent nation with its own independent tongue. He argued for it; he even banged the drum for it. Now, half a century of wisdom on, all hope is gone: the domination of English is complete, the tide irreversible, though not yet blood-dimmed. Even the Welsh do not want it, he says—they have lost sight of all that they might have been, even had the wily English given them half a chance to get it back. How much truth is there in all this—and how much is it the hopelessly romantic vision of the poet? The question hangs in the air.

The Welsh do not much like Thomas—he is too much of a maverick. They are doing their best, they would argue, to restore the language to its former glory. It is being taught, they remind us, in the primary schools with a renewed vigor. Too late, laments Thomas, all too late. What will they read when they have learned it? And how can anyone hope to put a brake on urbanization, that wanton desire to flee the land and its age-old patterns that is the final guarantor of a fixed and stable rural culture?

Since the 1950s, Thomas's poetry has become increasingly starker and sparer. He has always been a religious poet, of course—but now the questioning of God and his inscrutable purposes for this ever madder world is much more direct and that much more intense than before. It seems that all the questions must now be directed heavenward; to be footling around any longer with the transient beauties of nature or the curiously interesting imperfections of humankind is quite beside the point when one has limited time and limited resources. In fact, if you were to scratch the surface of R. S. Thomas, you would find that even in the days of his youth he did not have much time for human beings *per se*. He was never a humanist, never a one to embrace his flock with open arms—though, of course, he did his parish duties to the best of his abilities. It was the human as a type of something fixed in its habits, changing only with the changes of the seasons, that he was intent upon describing in those days: the immemorial Welshman who knew as if by some deep inner instinct what life required of him at any given moment. It was a conservative vision—and now there is little left to conserve. The laborer has gone off in pursuit of a better life elsewhere.

But what is the meaning of that "better"? asks Thomas of his God. And what is the nature of that elsewhere? And is the flight an act of wanton folly or not? He waits for an answer.

And, meanwhile, we shore his poetry against the ruins of his Welshman's days.

Acquaintance of poets

Donald Hall
Their Ancient Glittering Eyes:
Remembering Poets and More Poets.
Ticknor & Fields, 348 pages, $22.95

reviewed by Robert Richman

In 1978, Donald Hall published, to much acclaim, a book called *Remembering Poets*, memoirs of Dylan Thomas, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Robert Frost. (The book also reprinted, in an appendix, interviews Hall had conducted with Eliot and Pound for *The Paris Review*.) Hall did not have much to go on: he had met Pound in the course of a few days in Rome in 1960 during his interview assignment, and Eliot a few times in Cambridge in the early 1950s, twice at Eliot's

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London office a few years later, and then in New York in 1959, on the occasion of the interview. Thomas and Frost, too, Hall had met only occasionally over the years. Hall's lack of intimacy with his poets, which might have daunted another writer, turned out to be a boon. Free from the facts that sometimes encumber biographers, Hall instead relied on his own powers of speculation and general shrewdness about poets and the poetic life. This can be seen on every page of *Remembering Poets* but especially in Hall's account of Frost's dismissal of a student's weakly imitative poem at a writing conference that the sixteen-year-old Hall attended in 1945. (Frost said that Eliot, not the student, had written the poem.) Rather than use the episode to further the myth of Frost as an unspeakable ogre, as his official biographer, the philistine Lawrance Thompson, would have done, Hall argues that Frost's competitiveness—he wished the student had imitated *him*, not Eliot—provoked his behavior.

It may be wrong to call the pieces in *Remembering Poets* memoirs at all. Each essay contains much literary criticism as well as snippets of autobiography. Indeed, images of Hall as an overeager Harvard undergraduate encountering T. S. Eliot for the first time through correspondence or as a young man driving across Europe with his family in a rented Morris Minor in search of Pound are as memorable as anything his poets say or do. There seems to be a democratic impulse behind Hall's wish to insert himself: for every imperfection he reveals in his subjects, he wants to expose one in himself.

Their Ancient Glittering Eyes—the line is from Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli": "Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay"—contains more than the revised, expanded text of *Remembering Poets*. Two previously unpublished memoirs—one of Marianne Moore and one of Archibald MacLeish and Yvor Winters—are also included, as are two interviews with Moore, one from 1960 and one from 1965. As with Eliot and Pound, Hall met Moore mainly through his *Paris Review* assignment; he came to know MacLeish and Winters while he was enrolled at Harvard and Stanford, where the two men taught.

Hall calls his kind of writing "literary gossip, reminiscences by friends and acquaintances of authors," and cites William Hazlitt, the nineteenth-century English essayist, as a literary ancestor. Hall admires Hazlitt's recollections of Coleridge and Wordsworth because they remind us that poets are people—people, as Hall writes, "with small noses or Roman ones, voices that never stopped talking or voices with northern *burrs*." One of Hall's principal ambitions, to be sure, is to show that even the formidable modernists were human beings very much in possession of faces and voices not all that different from everyone else's.

And yet, much of what Hall divulges in these essays goes against the equalizing effect that Hazlitt sought and that Hall admires. For just as often Hall's revelations show us how *unlike* these great poets are from the rest of mankind. Frost's superhuman vanity, Thomas's pathological womanizing, Pound's acute self-hatred ("Everything that I touch, I spoil," he said), Eliot's candid self-doubt (he told his interlocutor that he didn't know whether his work had any lasting value): Hall everywhere confirms that many poets possess crippling quirks that most other people either curb or manage to shed before it is too late. Hall thinks that poetry is to blame: "At the end of the lives of poets," he writes in the conclusion to the essay on Pound, "the domestic life is a desert of anguish. . . . [F]or some poets . . . life's hell is a self-inflicted wound."

Hall's epigraph comes from Henry Adams: "I have long since made up my mind not to seek the acquaintance of poets." The evidence that Hall has assembled here allows us to understand why. There is Frost, who in his twenties and thirties refused to support his family as he struggled in vain with his writing. There is Dylan Thomas with his famous bouts of self-destructiveness, which finally culminated in a fatal overdose of drugs and alcohol at the age of thirty-nine. There is Ezra Pound in his old age declaring that "I

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have never made a person happy in my life." There is the spinsterish Marianne Moore with what Hall calls her "involuntary alienation" from the world. There is Yvor Winters with his obsessive fear of madness. In fact, the only poets who come off as relatively sound of mind and untortured by guilt for having devoted their lives to poetry are Eliot and MacLeish. MacLeish, or course, was bourgeois from the start and never let poetry impose on his personal life. As for Eliot, when Hall met him for his interview, he had only lately overcome, thanks to a fortunate second marriage, the misery of his early life. Hall's passing remark in the Thomas piece that "[t]he poet who survives is the poet to celebrate; the human being who confronts darkness and defeats it is the one to admire" applies more to Eliot, perhaps, than to anyone else in the book.

But in the end, Hall's portraits confirm our faith in poetry and its flawed makers. He reveals, for example, that Frost's wife Elinor remembered the notorious "Derry years"—the period when the family lived in poverty while Robert worked on his poems—as "idyllic." He shows us a considerate, affable MacLeish, whose kindness the arrogant Harvard student Donald Hall almost didn't deserve. He reveals the amusing fact that Moore, who was insufferably pedantic and a stickler for detail, published books riddled with errors. And although he acknowledges Winters's many failings, Hall insists that he "learned more about poetry from [him] than I learned from any other teacher."

What also offsets the almost celestial panoply of misdeeds is Hall's recognition of poetry's fixed, innate value. "Art's triumph endures in a world separate from the old mire and fury," he writes in his essay on Eliot. This indeed is a leitmotif of Hall's recollections: "Trust the poem, not the poet," he advises, noting that "I have never found it difficult to split poem from poet." And again in the Pound essay: "By means of the great and noble language of poetry, Ezra Pound assembled the best of himself and of the cultures he loved and studied. We find him forever in this Ithaca."

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The autobiographical element in *Their Ancient Glittering Eyes*, which often takes the form of Hall exposing his own flaws, also compensates for the parade of ugly revelations. Hall's main flaw is his astonishing naïveté. We learn, for example, that he failed to tell Frost that the introduction he provided for an anthology that Hall was editing was adequate—Hall assumed that the seventy-year-old poet didn't need to have his ego massaged, which wasn't the case. Another instance of Hall's ingenuousness was his assumption that he could secure readings for Pound in the United States—this at a time when the intense public antipathy for the poet would have made the undertaking impossible. By deflating slightly his own attempt to deflate the idea of the good, gray, and *gay* old poet—these poets' eyes glittered, but most were not gay—Hall seems to suggest that he learned from his subjects a lesson in humility. (It is a message, actually, that many of the poets of Hall's generation seem to have gleaned from their forebears, the modernists.) Ironically, Hall is compelled to introduce himself into his essays—a seemingly immodest tactic—to make palpable his new-found humility.

But even if this autobiographical element were absent, *Their Ancient Glittering Eyes* would still be a marvelous book. Hall's observations on poetry and poets are splendid: "[Frost] was a man possessed by guilt, by knowledge that he was *bad*, by the craving for love and the necessity to reject love offered—and by the desire for fame which no amount of celebrity could satisfy." Again:

> When you're writing a poem, you carry it with you day and night, for months or even years, often underneath the surface of waking thought; when you walk the dog or drive the car, a word for that poem may enter your consciousness when you do not know that you are thinking of it. When short-term memory fails, you lose that part of your brain that works when you don't know it's working.

(Here Hall is speculating on why older poets fail, and his reason—the loss of short-term memory—is the best explanation I have read.) And: "The notion of fame embarrasses us because we confuse it with mere lightness, like primping before a mirror; or we confuse it with celebrity." One thing is certain: no one will confuse Donald Hall, whose eminence as a poet is already acknowledged, for a pedestrian writer of prose. *Their Ancient Glittering Eyes* is one of the most insightful and enjoyable books on the art ever written.

Shorter notices

J. H. Willis, Jr.
Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers:
The Hogarth Press, 1917-41.
University Press of Virginia, 451 pages, $29.95

The whole idea appears to have been Leonard's. It was not prompted by economic necessity; the Woolfs had no dream of making money on the venture. Nor was it conceived as insurance against editorial stupidity; both writers had commercial firms sponsoring their work. Leonard was merely looking for a suitable pastime for his wife, a woman temperamentally unable to relax from her literary labors. "It struck me," Leonard wrote in his memoir *Beginning Again*, "that it would be good if Virginia had a manual occupation . . . which, in say the afternoons, would take her mind completely off her work." It was to that end that he bought her a handpress, a case of 10-point Caslon, and a how-to book for novice printers.

And so the Hogarth Press, destined to become one of the century's most distinguished and long-lived small publishers, began not even as a hobby, but as a kind of work therapy for an overworked novelist. Its first title, a thirty-four-page booklet called *Two Stories*, was published in the summer of 1917; it brought together Virginia's "The Mark on the Wall" and Leonard's "Three Jews" and was printed by the Woolfs, in an edition of 134 copies, on the dining-room table of Hogarth House, their home in Richmond, London. By 1924, when the Woolfs moved to Bloomsbury, the hand-

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press had been joined by a treadle press, and the Woolfs' more ambitious projects—Virginia's novels, for example—were being jobbed out to commercial printers. What had been started for Virginia's benefit had become Leonard's obsession, and through that obsession a thriving concern. Indeed, as J. H. Willis, Jr., writes in this, his history of the press's first quarter-century: "Leonard Woolf's operation of the press, with his passion for details, his meticulous accounting for every penny, his obvious relish for the minute particulars of all expenditures from stamps and glue to fonts of type, above all his canny budgeting and pricing, surely is as much a distinguishing feature of Hogarth as the presence of a great novelist with composing stick in hand, Virginia Woolf inky and determined."

Mr. Willis, a professor of English at the College of William and Mary, takes the Hogarth story through 1941, the year of Virginia's suicide; five years later, Leonard would sell the firm to a larger publisher, Chatto & Windus, which would keep him on as a press director until his death in 1969. This story has been told before, most memorably by John Lehmann, who joined Hogarth as "trainee manager" in 1931 and was Leonard's full partner at the time of the sale to Chatto. His brief memoir, *Thrown to the Woolfs* (1978), tells the essential story of Hogarth: what the press meant to the Woolfs, their assistants, and their long list of authors, and what it meant to English literary culture of the Twenties and Thirties. What Mr. Willis adds to the story is detail, a superabundance of it, most of it the result of a recent find in a disused Chatto storeroom: thirty-two grime-covered file boxes of Hogarth records "containing over six hundred separate files on press authors and their books." His book is a contribution less to literary biography than to business history; here are press runs, sales figures, grosses and nets for some five hundred Hogarth titles. These numbers can be fascinating when they concern such books as T. S. Eliot's *Poems* (1918) and *The Waste Land* (1923); they are much less so when they concern, say, a dozen long-forgotten novels by Vita Sackville-West. If the book is often genuinely valuable, as when it sets Hogarth in the context of the era's bustling small-press scene, outlines Hogarth's program in translations from the Russian, or tells how the Woolfs became the U.K. publisher of Freud, it is also often wooden, repetitious, even downright boring: it wants to be an annotated checklist, not a continuous narrative. Specialists in publishing history will find great fun in this sorting-out of old file boxes. Lovers of Bloomsbury, and of portrait-drawing in prose, are advised to stick with *Thrown to the Woolfs*.

—*Christopher Carduff*

Robert Phillips, editor
Delmore Schwartz and James Laughlin: Selected Letters.
Norton, 382 pages, $29.95

In Dreams Begin Responsibilities (1938), the first collection of poems and stories by Delmore Schwartz (1913-1966), brought him acclaim as the most promising poet of his generation; yet Schwartz's later books failed to satisfy critics, and eventually his ambition and productivity collapsed under the weight of self-disillusionment, anxiety, insomnia, and manic depression. All along, however, Schwartz continued to write letters, many of them hilarious, some of them demented, and not a few of them to his longtime editor James Laughlin, with whose fledgling publishing house, New Directions, he cast his lot when both were in their early twenties and Laughlin a Harvard undergraduate and steel-corporation heir.

This correspondence tells a poignant story not only of a business relationship but of a close friendship in which the Brooklyn-born Schwartz's emotional dependence upon his editor is as manifest as Laughlin's devotion to him. If his early missives give us Schwartz the clever, cocky, culture-mad boy genius, teeming with ideas for poems and stories and with tendentious views of the latest highbrow books and essays, his later dispatches are by turns bitter, frantic, and pathetic,

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packed with literary backbiting, baseball chitchat, money worries, desperate puns, career intrigues, pop-culture references, and the occasional unfounded assertion that Laughlin has defrauded or otherwise betrayed him. Laughlin, for his part, remains a gentleman, taking time out to help Schwartz financially and turning the other cheek to accusations of perfidy.

One is constantly aware of the dramatic differences in their lives: while Schwartz (who, for all his fascination with Europe, never left America) spent most of his adult years pacing the Cambridge-New York-Princeton intellectual corridor, patching together a modest income by teaching composition, writing book reviews, reading manuscripts for New Directions, and serving on the *Partisan Review* editorial board, Laughlin whiled away his time skiing in Utah and writing to Schwartz from such exotic locales as Tehran and Val d'Isère. If Laughlin seems to have circulated effortlessly among his literary confreres, Schwartz was increasingly tormented by his role as a Jew in the Ivy League and in rural New Jersey (to which he moved with his second wife, the novelist Elizabeth Pollet, in 1951). When Laughlin urges him in 1953 to distance himself from his *Partisan Review* colleagues ("Isn't it really time," Laughlin writes, "for the whole *PR* crowd to disappear?"), Schwartz replies that staying on that magazine's staff "is a way of keeping in touch with people and having friends, however trying. After all, I do have a hard time knowing people, since I am often utterly lacking in social initiative, depressed, etc. and who else is available?"

Though this volume consists mostly of material by Schwartz that has already appeared in *Letters of Delmore Schwartz* (1984)—which was, like the present book, expertly edited and annotated by Schwartz's literary executor, the poet Robert Phillips—the addition of Laughlin's less sensational replies makes for an engaging and illuminating dialogue. Yet Schwartz gets the first and last word here. The opening item is a 1937 cover letter accompanying, among other things, the story "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" (which, because Laughlin didn't snap it up fast enough, ended up making a huge splash as the lead piece in the inaugural issue of the William Phillips-Philip Rahv *Partisan Review*); and the book closes with a 1963 telegram to Laughlin, from whom Schwartz had by then been estranged for several years: "HOW ABOUT SMOKING A PEACE PIPE WITH ME." One's heart goes out to both of them.

—*Bruce Bawer*

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Letters

Clement Greenberg

To the Editors:

Clement Greenberg once observed that critics of his writing tended to read more into themselves than into his articles. Hilton Kramer's rebuttal of my introduction to volumes 3 and 4 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, "Clement Greenberg and the Cold War" (March 1993), seems to entail a similar kind of inverted reading. Mr. Kramer accuses me of reducing "every aesthetic idea, if not aesthetics itself, to a suspect political datum" and of adopting a "belligerent voice" in my analysis of Greenberg's shifting critical position in the 1950s and 1960s.

I do not deny that politics play a role in my deliberations about art. But I wonder if politics do not excite more interest on Mr. Kramer's part than on mine. I invite readers to examine my introduction and to compare it with Mr. Kramer's review. In which piece is the fixation on politics greater? And in which, by the way, is the tone of voice adopted the more immoderate?

John O'Brian
Department of Fine Arts
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Hilton Kramer replies:

John O'Brian is being disingenuous in attempting to change the subject, which is what *he* wrote about Clement Greenberg in his introduction to volumes 3 and 4 of *The Collected Essays and Criticism* and whether for political purposes it misrepresented Mr. Greenberg's views. The best comment on this question is Mr. Greenberg's. In an interview with Peter Plagens in *Newsweek* (April 19), Mr. Greenberg spoke as follows: "I should have known there was something that wasn't right about John O'Brian. It's an inappropriate introduction, but it doesn't pain me. Hilton Kramer [in a review in *The New Criterion*], however, was quite right to nail him as he did."

What remains to be explained is why Mr. O'Brian is now trying to deny or obscure or otherwise misrepresent his goals in that introduction.

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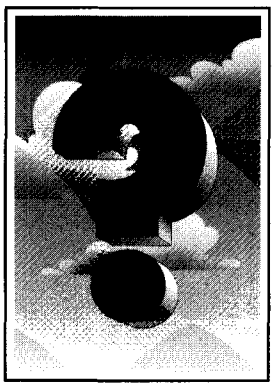

Most 8 or 9 year-olds know exactly what they want to be when they grow up. Most 17 or 18 year-olds don't.

And that, as we at Adelphi University see it, is as it should be.

We offer 17 and 18 year-olds a rather (for this day and age) unusual kind of college experience; one that, in the words of our president, Dr. Peter Diamandopoulos, "provides students with the learning necessary to reflect sensitively and judiciously on their place and their possibilities in the world."

Or as W.E.B. Du Bois (himself a graduate of Harvard, the Adelphi of Massachusetts) once put it, "the purpose of education is not to make men carpenters, but to make carpenters men." Substitute "lawyers" or "bankers" for "carpenters," and you get the idea.

ADELPHI UNIVERSITY Garden City, NY 11530. To arrange a tour, call 1-800-ADELPHI.

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